MODERN SAINTS

AND

Servants of God.

ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI.

The Saints and Servants of God.

THE LIVES

OF

ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI,

OF THE THIRD ORDER OF ST. DOMINICK;

ST. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO;

B. BENVENUTA OF BOJAN;

AND

B. CATHERINE OF RACONIGI,

OF THE ORDER OF ST. DOMINICK.

"Gaude Maria Virgo, cunctas hæreses sola interemisti in universo mundo."—*Antiph. Ecclesiæ.*

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M.DCCC.LII.

We hereby approve and sanction the Series of Lives of the Canonized and Beatified Saints, the Servants of God declared Venerable, and others commonly reputed to have died in the odour of sanctity, now in course of publication by the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, and we cordially recommend it to the Faithful, as calculated to promote the glory of God and of His Saints, the increase of devotion, and the spread of our holy Religion.

Given at Westminster, the Feast of the Nativity of our B. Lady, A. D. 1851.

N. Cant. Wiseman

Acc. 5394

TO

THE NUNS OF ENGLAND,

WHO SHIELD THEIR COUNTRY BY THEIR PRAYERS,

AND BY THEIR MEEK AUSTERITIES

MAKE REPARATION FOR ITS SINS;

AND TO

THE SISTERS OF MERCY,

WHOSE CHARITY IS THEIR INCLOSURE,

WHILE FOR THE LOVE OF THEIR HEAVENLY SPOUSE

IN HIS POOR AND SUFFERING MEMBERS

THEY DENY THEMSELVES

THE PEACE AND PROTECTION OF THE CLOISTER.

Daughters of Mary! in retreats obscure,
Lost to man's thought and eye, amid the trees
And unfrequented fields, on bended knees
Sueing for England's pardon, lives so pure
Mingle in heaven and God's approval share
With that uncloistered love, whose willing feet
Are borne through jeering crowd and gazing street
To scenes of lonely want and pining care.
For you the holy past is now unfurled,
That with its bright examples you may feed
The spirit of devotion. While the world
Honours your goodness with its hatred, you,
Still to your high and calm vocation true,
May win fresh light and strength from what you read.

F. W. Faber.

St. Wilfrid's,
Feast of our Lady of Redemption,
M.DCCC.XLVII.

PREFACE.

The present volume contains the Lives of four Saints of the Order of S. Dominick. The Life of S. Catherine of Ricci, the friend and contemporary of S. Philip Neri, is from the Italian Life, anonymous, but announced as cavata de' Sommarj de' Processi, published in Rome, 1746, with the usual permissions. The Life of S. Agnes of Montepulciano is from the Italian "Istoria composta da un Academico Intrigato," published at Sienna 1779. The Life of Benvenuta is translated from the original of "Frater Joannes Franciscus Bernardus Maria de Rubeis, Ordinis Prædicatorum," printed at Venice in 1757. It was principally composed from a manuscript in the convent at Friuli, which bore signs of having been written by "Frater Conradus de Castellerio," confessor to the Blessed Benvenuta. It has the imprimatur of "Frater Joannes Thomas de Boxadors," general of the order of preach-

ers, and that of the "Reformatori dello Studio di Padova."

The Life of B. Catherine of Raconigi is from the collection of Dominican Lives by Father Serafino Razzi, well known from his numerous biographies of the Saints.

Some readers may be startled at the story which is told in the Life of the B. Catherine of Raconigi, that S. Peter Martyr heard her confession and gave her absolution. There may of course be a difference of opinion as to whether this absolution was sacramental or not. Without determining this question, we subjoin the opinions of theologians. Suarez (De Sacr. Disp. 13. Sect. 1.) and Billuart (De Sacr. Diss. 5. Art. 2.) after S. Thomas, (Summa. 3. Qu. 66. 7. 2.) hold that blessed souls in heaven, supposing that they were reunited to their bodies, could minister the sacraments, and that, without any extraordinary dispensation on the part of God, on the ground that the state of a viator is not necessary for their administration. They add, however, that a blessed soul in the state of

separation from the body would require a special commission, even if it were that of a priest; because the sacraments require the presence of the senses. The conclusion of the whole we give in De Lugo's words: "We allow with S. Thomas and others, that supposing an angel or a blessed soul, whether in or out of a glorious body, were to administer a sacrament, it should be considered as valid; because in such a case it would in every way be right to believe that it happened by a peculiar dispensation of God, the sovereign Lord of grace and of the sacraments," (De Sacr. Disp. 8. Sect. 1.)

Something remains to be said in answer to the queries and suggestions of our kind correspondents. Some of our subscribers wish to see explanatory notes attached to each volume. It is undoubtedly true that this would be a very useful work, and that much interesting illustration might be brought to bear upon the difficulties of the Lives of the Saints. But it should be remembered, not only that to do such a work well would have to

be a man's sole occupation, but also that it is quite contrary to the very *idea* of our undertaking, as put forward in the original Prospectus, and upon which we obtained the sanction of superiors. We are not putting forward, rather studiously avoiding to put forward, our own work, or becoming the champions of any peculiar views. Our task was to be a humble one, though we trusted great fruits were to come of it. We were to be merely the editors of translations, to give to the Catholic public fair specimens, and in time a moderately good collection, of a certain literature which forms the spiritual reading of Catholic countries, and on which the spiritual life of Italy, Spain, and France is moulded. The works from which we translate have received the approval of superiors in the countries where they were published, and consequently, if the translations be faithful, they come to the reader at least with a respectable amount of authority, such as the comments of the editors would not have. The original question was, whether the publication of such translations was dis-

creet or seasonable in England; upon that head there was formerly a difference of opinion, which we are led to believe is now much less than it was, if, indeed, it exists at all. But for us,—superiors settled it, and the series was begun. To publish these Lives now with commentaries and explanations would be to start a new work on a different principle from the present series, not to continue it; and if we believed at starting that the idea we put forward was the safest and would work best, much more are we satisfied of it now that the series has had the experience of nearly six years upon its head; so far as ourselves are concerned, it is the only principle on which other duties and avocations would permit us to continue the work at all. The fact is, some of our friends will persist in looking out for a literary or theological work, which would be more to their taste, in spite of all our asseverations that we are aiming at no more than to supply "edifying reading for families, schools, and religious refectories." When we have done more than this, it has only been in defence of

the series as it is. Yet our friends should not be disappointed at our not giving what we never promised. We have nothing to do with promoting literature or intellectual culture by means of Saints' Lives; but to furnish spiritual reading to those whose spiritual directors have made it part of their daily devout life. Perhaps it may answer that end none the worse because the intellectual interest is so little. All we have to regret is that even, as translations, the Lives are often below the standard which we had once aspired to reach. This literary defect has not, we trust, gone to the length of injuring the success of the volumes as spiritual reading.

Others of our friends wish that we would publish fewer of the "Mystical" Saints, and confine ourselves more to the saints of active beneficence and philanthropy. We fear we must first of all join issue on the facts. Up to the present volume, 30 volumes of Lives have been published, of which the following, it is presumed, can in no sense be called "Mystical:"

	VOLS.
1. Of S. Philip, and the Fathers of the Oratory	6
2. Of S. Alphonso and his Companions	6
3. Of S. Ignatius and Jesuit Fathers	5
4. S. Camillus, S. Joseph Calasanctius, B. Leonard of Port Maurice, S. Thomas Villanova, and B. Sebastian	6
5. S. Jane Frances de Chantal	1½
6. V. Margaret Mary	2
	26½

This leaves S. Rose, S. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, V. Benedict Joseph, and about half the second volume of S. Jane Frances, that is at most 3½ volumes to 26½; and if the series is to be a fair representation of the body of Christian literature it professes to represent, no one will say this is an unfair proportion of "extraordinary" to "practical" saints. "But bring out those which will please Protestants most." This is not the object; the series is meant for a spiritual, not a controversial, end; though, as we expected, and indeed foretold in the Prospectus, the instances have not been few in which God has been pleased

to bless it to the latter use. If we were first to bring out all the most practical saints together, and then all the most extraordinary ones together, it is hardly necessary to say that we should never get the latter volumes in circulation, and so make no fair representation of modern hagiology; besides causing a great deal more prejudice and offence than by the present arrangement. The series, like all other "serials," and specially such as take in a wide range, must necessarily look unequal and irregular at first, and will gain symmetry as it gains bulk. Every one has his favourite volumes in a series, and people seldom agree in their favourites. A series seems to be tolerably well answering its end, when opposite charges are brought against it, and the charges on both sides equally kind and equally witnessing to the sympathy and interest taken in the work.

The Oratory. London,
Feast of St. Wilfrid.
1852.

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THE LIFE

OF

ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI,

OF THE THIRD ORDER OF PREACHERS.

THE LIFE

OF

ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI,

OF THE THIRD ORDER OF PREACHERS.

CHAPTER I.

ST. CATHERINE'S BIRTH AND EDUCATION.

Sister Catherine de' Ricci was born on the 23rd of April, 1522, in the city of Florence, which has ever proved a fruitful mother, not only of men illustrious in the world, but also of saints in heaven. It appears from the public registers kept in the city, that she was baptized by the name of Lessandra, or Alessandra, on the 25th of the same month, whence arose the mistaken opinion that she was born on the 25th of April. Her parents were Pier Francesco de' Ricci and Caterina di Ridolfo da Panzano, of the house of Ricasoli, both belonging to noble and ancient Florentine families. At the proper age, she received the sacrament of confirmation. She was scarcely

born before her mother passed from this to a better life, so she was educated by Fiammetta Diacetta, her father's second wife, a noble lady of great wisdom and virtue, who very soon perceived how much this infant was inclined to devotion and to spiritual things. She continually showed signs of her future sanctity, not only by her assiduity at prayer, but also by her rigorous abstinence from food. It was a subject of astonishment to the whole household, how she could live upon so little. From her tenderest years she shunned every childish amusement, and all the ornaments and vanities of the world, in order to dedicate herself only to works of charity, to prayer, and to contemplating the most holy Passion of Jesus.

As soon as she was able to articulate anything, she began to pray with so much and such intense devotion, that even her external actions showed that her heart corresponded to what her lips uttered, and continually went deeper and deeper in the contemplation of the sense of her words. It was a wonderful thing to see a child only four or five years old, remain silently and modestly retired in the most solitary part of the house, in order to be free from all distractions. Here she devoted her whole soul to consider the Passion of Jesus, and her tongue to recite the Lord's Prayer and the Angelical salutation. In order to produce in her mind a more real idea of those lofty mysteries, and to awaken a more lively desire of imitating, and participating in the bitter sorrows of those dolorous mysteries, she made the position of her arms correspond with the direction of her

thoughts. When she meditated on our Lord's Prayer in the Garden, she raised them towards heaven, and turned them behind her back when she considered Him tied to the pillar; she pressed them to her head, looking at Him crowned with thorns, and finally extended them, standing in spirit before the Cross. Heaven was not slow to give her a share in its consolations. She enjoyed the visible presence of her Angel Guardian, not merely once, but very many times, and he always comforted her spirit. On this occasion he taught her how to pray, and explained and pointed out the mysteries which she ought to meditate upon. Most of them were of the most holy Passion, to which she retained a special devotion during the whole remainder of her life. He also instructed her in the method of reciting the Rosary, which she henceforward practised every day.

These fervent prayers kindled a desire, which ever increased in strength, not of earthly nuptials, according to her father's wish, but according to the inspirations of the Redeemer of the world, of celestial ones. Without manifesting this to any one, she repeatedly entreated not only her father, but her step-mother as well, to place her in some monastery. At last they satisfied her wishes by sending her to the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter, which is called Monticelli, in Florence, near the gate of San Fridiano, where her aunt Donna Ludovica de' Ricci was superioress. Here, as she grew in years, she grew more and more fervent in prayer and meditation, spending in these many hours of the day. The hours fixed in the mon-

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astery for those exercises, seemed few and short to her love of God ; therefore she deprived herself of the recreation which children are usually allowed, and retired into the choir to pray. In order to be more at liberty, and more hidden from the eyes of others, she used to conceal herself under the curtain of a grating, which faced a painted crucifix in the church. In this position she was able to feed her tender gaze on the figure of her divine Spouse, while the meditation of His most holy Passion caused her to be entirely dissolved in tears. A holy curiosity induced some of the nuns to watch her, who were moved to devotion by seeing a young child so enamoured of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, accompanying Him with her gestures, as we have described, and always entreating to be made worthy to serve Him in a monastery where the rules were strictly observed, in which she might save her soul. She never would have given over these prayers of her own accord, so that her aunt had very frequently to call her when it was time she should take her meals or go to sleep. Seeing her eyes red and tearful, she enquired the reason of it, and the child answered in holy simplicity, that when she moved the curtains the splinters and dust fell into her eyes. A cautious wisdom taught her to assign this cause for fear of betraying the tears which sprung from the love that was in her heart towards her suffering Spouse.

It was not long before our gracious Redeemer testified His satisfaction by appearing to her, and giving her many internal and external consola-

tions. It is a common belief even at this period, that she frequently heard His voice in that figure which she gazed upon so tenderly. It is exposed above the chapel of St. Antony, and held in great veneration, and is called the crucifix of Sandrina, which was the name she then bore.

However, this Divine Spouse, who wished to enrich her with the same gifts and graces with which He adorned St. Catherine of Sienna, did not inspire her to remain in that monastery, but to go and examine others, until she found one in which she might fully satisfy her desire of suffering a strict poverty in company with Jesus. Our holy child well understood these inspirations, and in her conversations with her aunt and the other nuns, showed her disposition to follow them. It grieved them much to see that she was so little inclined to remain with them, and that they were likely to lose such a great treasure. They, nevertheless, resigned themselves quietly and humbly to the Divine will, still flattering themselves that, perhaps, some day they should have the consolation of seeing this wish change. She, on the other hand, feeling her desire of trying some other monasteries daily increase, perceived that it was not God's will that she should pass her life here, and resolved to speak openly on the subject to her aunt, beseeching her to persuade her father to accede to her wishes. This request pierced her affectionate aunt's heart, but knowing that her spirit was specially guided by God, she not only did not oppose it, but spoke about it to her brother. He willingly agreed to take her away from that monastery, and

to bring her home, since his intention was to settle her in honourable earthly matrimony. He was resolved not to grant the other half of her request, which was to place her in another monastery; but we shall see in the next chapter how vain it is for the creature to oppose itself to the Divine decrees.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAINT RETURNS TO HER FATHER'S HOUSE, AND ENTERS THE MONASTERY OF ST. VINCENT AT PRATO.

Sandrina, on her return home in the 9th year of her age, asked her step-mother to let her have some place in the house, separated from her brothers and sisters, where she might retire at certain times, to make a devout prayer in solitude. Permission being given, and a room allotted her, she adorned it with several holy pictures, and very often resorted to it to pray, spending in that employment whole days and nights.

Our saint had four brothers and a sister; they were all younger than herself, but they loved her so much for her goodness and gentleness, that they would have liked to be always by her side. Perceiving, however, that the love of relations was a hindrance to the liberty of the spirit, she was accustomed after dinner and supper, in an ingenious and winning manner, to take leave of her parents, and having obtained their blessing, she withdrew herself

from childish amusements, and went away into her oratory. Here she immediately began to pray to God that He would open her a way to the seclusion of some monastery, that she might give free vent to her love towards Him. She so burned with this Divine Love that human conversation was almost insupportable to her, being accustomed to the company of angels, which she often enjoyed even in her father's house. She often entreated her step-mother with great earnestness, to take her to see other monasteries, where the rule was truly and holily observed. This wise lady readily agreed, and shewed her several, but although many pleased her, she did not find one in which there was that strictness in observing the rule which she desired.

While she was agitated by this holy anxiety, her father, Pier Francesco, removed to one of his country-houses not far from Prato, with his whole family. In that city of Prato, then one of the most celebrated places in Europe, there was a monastery dedicated to St. Vincent Ferrer, which was built in 1504. It belonged to the Third Order of Preachers, commonly called Sisters of Penance, and the lay-sisters used to go out to seek alms, for the monastery was very poor.

As soon as the nuns knew of the arrival of Sandrina's father, who was a very charitable man, they sent two lay-sisters to his villa, which was called the estate of St. Paul, to ask for some assistance. When Sister Catherine, who this time accompanied the family saw these nuns at a distance, she ran out to meet them, and wel-

comed them with great joy. Afterwards, having stopped to speak to them, and having observed their remarkable modesty and piety, she persuaded her father to detain them there for a few days. Nothing had ever been seen to delight the child more than conversing with these sisters. She talked with them at length about the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, their rules and constitutions, and the mortifications which they practised; and having learnt from them that she could find in that monastery all that her burning love towards her Divine and chosen Spouse required, she found herself moved by an unspeakable satisfaction, such as she never felt before or after, and a desire to consecrate herself to God among them. She therefore resolved, and gave a promise to the sisters, that she would retire from the world with them. They willingly received this promise, as they were struck with admiration by the goodness which her words displayed, but they dared not mention it to any one in the house, seeing how tenderly they all loved her. The fear which prevented the sisters from speaking to her father, did not restrain Sandrina, who had set her heart on that monastery; he repulsed her demand with a decided manner, and was so much annoyed at it, that he forbade her to speak to him again on the subject; and having given some alms to the sisters, he dismissed them from his house. On their return to the monastery, they described their intercourse with our blessed child to their superioresses and the other nuns.

Father Timoteo de'Ricci, her father's brother, who died Prior of Saint Dominic's at Perugia in 1552, with a great reputation for sanctity, was then confessor to the monastery, and the nuns related to him what the lay-sisters had said, begging him to intercede with his brother, that he might send the child there, at least for a few days. The good father undertook this task, and went to the villa, but in vain, for when he explained the wishes of the nuns to his brother, he gave him a positive refusal; and told him that his daughter had too much inclination for a religious life, whereas he was determined by her marriage to make a good connexion, and had every reason to fear, as the sequel showed, that if he allowed her to go there for a few days, it would not be so easy to bring her back again, and to change the resolution she had begun to form, which refusal greatly afflicted Catherine.

Nevertheless, neither she nor the nuns despaired of the accomplishment of their wishes, and they began to make earnest prayers that God would condescend to soften her father's heart. In effect Mother Margaret de'Bardi the prioress, when she went to Florence on business, for the rule of enclosure was not then made, renewed the entreaty to Catherine's father, who, in consideration of the great esteem she was held in at Florence, and her courteous manner of asking, could not, although it pained him deeply, refuse her request, as he had that of others, and he permitted his daughter to go with her under the express condition that she returned after ten days. When

Catherine heard this, she understood that she was not forsaken by the right hand of God, which had opened a shorter way to the accomplishment of her desires; and after offering her humble thanksgiving, she bade farewell to her parents, brothers, and sisters, and on the appointed day set out with the prioress from her father's house, full of joy and satisfaction.

CHAPTER III.

THE SAINT'S CONSTANCY IN REMAINING IN THE MONASTERY.

The following fact, which happened on Catherine's first entrance into these long-wished-for cloisters, ought not to be omitted. As soon as she was in the monastery, she went to the church to adore and thank Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. On her way she met Sister Costanza de'Borri, who, on seeing her, exclaimed, "Here is our little directress, here is our guide," words which were probably inspired, for they were verified in process of time, when Catherine was made prioress, and governed the monastery for many years. She found almost all the sisters assembled in the church to receive her, and to return due thanks to God; and after conversing with her for a little while, they accompanied her to the cell destined for her, and each retired to her own. In spite of the great poverty of the house,

and the number of the nuns which, according to Father Tommaso Neri, amounted to one hundred and thirty, Catherine was able to practise among them, in all their fulness, charity, obedience to the constitutions, fervour, mortification, and religious simplicity, with all that is necessary to a perfect community life.

By practising these things she became more and more convinced that she ought to execute her resolution of consecrating her virginity to God in a convent, and she solemnly promised in His presence that, if she could possibly help it, she would never more return to her father's house; which resolution she strictly adhered to when her constancy was put to the test. When the ten days which her father had named were expired, one of her brothers arrived to reconduct her home, but she answered boldly, that he should tell her father that she refused to return, because the Lord had brought her there, and she had promised Him to remain there for her whole life; and she charged him to make her excuses for not obeying him in this matter, because in the choice of a state of life she could obey God alone. When her brother heard this firm and decided answer he returned to Florence, and reported the whole to his father. On hearing it he became furious, and without loss of time, set out for Prato, being resolved, if necessary, to employ force to bring her home; but all was in vain, for when his daughter appeared before him, she listened submissively to his menaces and his cruel reproaches, but did not yield in the least, repeating that it was God's will that she should be

there, and that she had resolved and promised Him that she would execute it; therefore he ought to excuse her, since she could not and ought not to give her obedience to him, when God, to whom she first owed obedience, had shown her that she ought to remain.

When he heard her reiterate this firm reply, he changed his angry language and spoke with a father's kindness, beseeching her not to afflict him so grievously, by refusing to return with him to Florence. She, however, relying on the apostolic precept, that "we ought to obey God rather than men,"* remained firm as a rock in the midst of such a fierce tempest, and continued to make excuses to her father for not obeying him in this, because that monastery was the home where God had decreed that she should serve him, and where she would remain to receive the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic, if, by the mercy of God, the sisters would grant it to her; and she told him that all his efforts were useless, because of the promise which she had made to God.

Her father replied that God Himself insisted in the Gospel on children obeying their parents, and threatened the disobedient with heavy punishments; but she, who had been well instructed by her guardian angel that eternal happiness is promised to him who leaves his father's house for love of God, answered that he was only losing his time and trouble, for, she said, "I am resolved to give up my life sooner than leave this monastery." This answer pierced her father to the heart, but

* Acts v. 29.

being convinced of her constancy, he had recourse to a stratagem, and begged that since she was resolved to become a nun she would return for at least eight or ten days, to take leave of her step-mother and her family, and promised after that, to bring her back to the monastery. This subterfuge did not shake in the smallest degree the child's determination never to return to her home, but when the nuns and her uncle and confessor begged her to satisfy her father, and pledged themselves that he would be faithful to his promise, she consented, but to be more certain of her return, she made the condition that her father should swear, in the presence of all, to bring her back after ten days. For the sake of enjoying her presence for those few days, he agreed to do this, and when he had made the oath, sister Catherine, having received the Superioress's and the Confessor's blessing, bade farewell with tears to the sisters, and arrived at Florence after a prosperous journey, to the great satisfaction of all her relations.

CHAPTER IV.

HER RETURN TO THE MONASTERY—HER CLOTHING AND PROFESSION.

Each hour that she passed in her father's house seemed a thousand years to sister Catherine, and she made incessant and tearful supplications to the Most High, that He would bend her father's

heart to taking her back to the monastery, where she might put on the habit of Penance or of the Third Order of St. Dominic ; but in proportion to the increasing vehemence of her desires, her father's apparent forgetfulness of his promise increased, and he put her off with fair words whenever she reminded him of it.

This grieved her so much, that it caused her to fall ill, like St. Catherine of Sienna, when her entrance into the same order was deferred. Her recovery from this illness was not less extraordinary than that of St. Catherine of Sienna. While she suffered as much from the separation from her sisters, and the fear that her weakness would postpone her return to the monastery, as from the fever itself, she spent her whole time in beseeching the Almighty with tears that she might rise from her bed and go to the monastery. Jesus presently consoled His afflicted Spouse by appearing to her with His most holy Mother and her kind patrons St. Cecilia and St. Thecla, holding a precious ring in His hand, and enquired why she grieved so deeply, whereas He who had commenced the work was ready to finish it ; to which she answered with deep humility, " Thou, O my Redeemer, who readest the secrets of hearts, knowest well that my tears are only caused by seeing the time of my being consecrated to Thee, deferred." Then our Lord answered, " Therefore am I come to heal thee," which promise He fulfilled by giving her His blessing, adding that she must prepare herself to endure many troubles in the religious life, and to suffer many disturbances and infirmi-

ties, many assaults of diabolical stratagems, and many rigorous examinations of her conduct, which her superiors would make, fearing that her ecstasies might be diabolical allusions, but that He would always give her His assistance, with which everything should turn to her good; lastly, having shown her the ring He held in His hand, He promised to give it her, when in His own good time He should declare that she was His spouse. Then, the most Holy Virgin, with the two other saints, comforted her, and the vision ceased, leaving her full of unspeakable joy. When Sister Catherine saw that she was cured, she rose from her bed, and after returning humble thanks to the Giver of all good, went to see her relations that were in the house, particularly her father, whom she again entreated to allow her to go to the monastery of St. Vincent. When he saw that she had thus unexpectedly recovered her health, he understood that it was the will of God that she should be there, and this, joined to the remorse which he felt for breaking his oath, and the powerful arguments of Federigo de' Ricci, another of his brothers, made him determine to fulfil his promises and satisfy his daughter's mind; so without any delay, he took her back to the monastery, leaving her with full power to execute all her promises to her Divine Spouse.

The great joy felt by her and all the nuns on her return, was a presage of her future sanctity. All her father's opposition having quietly ceased, she laid aside every other thought but that of endeavouring by devout prayers and rigorous mortifica-

tions to prepare herself to receive the holy habit, with an ardent desire of imitating the holy patriarch, St. Dominic, whose Third order she wished to enter; and St. Catherine of Sienna, whose holiness was one of the great ornaments of that branch of the order.

When she entered her fourteenth year, she entreated the nuns to receive her among them, which they, with reciprocal love consented to do, and on the 18th of May, 1535, which was kept that year as Whit-Monday, she had the happiness of receiving the holy habit at the hands of Father Timoteo de' Ricci, her uncle and confessor, who, having observed how exactly she followed in the footsteps of S. Catherine of Sienna, changed her name of Sandrina into that of Catherine. While a girl named Maria Raffaella Buonamici was receiving the habit after her, she retired to one side with a lighted taper in her hand, and as she waited on her knees during the clothing of her companion, she fell into an ecstasy in which she received many spiritual consolations, and many graces, from Jesus and Mary, who told her that since she had repudiated the company of mortals, she should have that of the immortal inhabitants of heaven. She was also shown in that ecstasy the fervour and devotion of several of the nuns of that house, and the fire of Divine love which burned in their hearts; and the Lord pointed out sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, as her guardian, and commanded that soon as the superiors assigned her as such, she was to obey her even in the smallest things.

The sight of so many celestial favours inflamed her spirit more and more with the love of God, in which she made such progress, that she could think of nothing but of Him, and the unusual graces which He of His mere bounty heaped upon her. On fire with this love, she frequently lost the use of her senses, absorbed in ecstatic contemplations, which at that time were not recognised as true ecstasies, but were considered to be fainting fits occasioned by some illness, especially as her humility assisted in hiding them from every one, calling them fits of drowsiness.

It is not easy to express the joy which filled Catherine's heart as soon as she returned to her senses, on seeing herself clothed in that much-desired habit which she had obtained by so many conflicts, and she henceforward increased her devotions, prayers, penances, and fastings, and macerated her flesh still more with disciplines, which did not however prevent her from being ready to fulfil all her regular duties and those imposed by obedience. She was affable and benignant towards every one, amiable in conversation and manners, and humble in exercising the lowest offices of the house, thinking and frequently calling herself the vilest and most useless of all, while she sought with all her might to learn quickly all the ceremonies and regulations of the holy religion which she professed, so that for her virtues she was not less admired than beloved by all.

Her Divine Spouse continued to console her by frequent ecstasies and visions of spiritual things; but she hid these graces from every one with

much caution, having determined not to manifest them to a single living person. She did not know at this tender age the great danger there is of being deluded by similar visions and ecstasies which proceed from the infernal enemy, unless the person who receives them is directed by another, who with real wisdom can discern the true from the false and the good from the evil, which she afterwards confessed when obliged by obedience to manifest them.

Every one believed, according to her own assertion, that they were fainting-fits, and hence arose a fierce storm in her mind. The nuns, thinking that as they now happened so often in process of time, they would make her altogether unequal to the duties of the monastery, repented of having received her, and conferred upon the subject with the confessor, who also repented of having assisted in bringing her here, and protested that since his niece had succeeded so ill, he would never again take part in the admission of girls. This discourse was heard unseen by Catherine, who without ever showing that she knew anything of it, retired secretly full of grief at the danger there was of their refusing to let her make her profession, but praying for God's assistance in a matter so important to her, she resigned herself entirely to His will, and placed her sole confidence in His aid.

When the time of her profession drew near, remembering the discussion, and considering herself utterly vile and useless, she earnestly begged all the nuns, with tears in her eyes, that they

would not exclude her from their company, for she trusted that the Divine Mercy would give her strength and enable her to make more progress in the service of the house than she had in the year of her probation.

Her great humility and the other virtues which they remarked in her, pleased the nuns so much, that they allowed her to make her solemn profession without objecting to her faintings, after which she thanked each of the nuns separately for their great charity in admitting her. Although she much wished to postpone it to the Assumption, she willingly obeyed when desired to make it on the 24th of June, 1536, the feast of St. John Baptist, in the hands of Father Angiolo da Diaceto, prior of the convent of St. Dominic at Perugia, who was afterwards bishop of Fiesole.

Many years had not passed, however, before her uncle and confessor, seeing the great degree of sanctity to which she had attained, blamed himself very often, to use his own expression, for the aforesaid conversation with the nuns, and begged pardon of our Lord for those words, which had troubled His spouse and afflicted that heart so dear to Him.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE SAINT'S GREAT FAITH AND HOPE.

As soon as Catherine beheld herself consecrated by vows to her Divine Spouse, she began to go in search of the perfection required by the religious state, and was an example before the eyes of all of those virtues which are more admirable than imitable. Their number is so great, that laying aside the narrative of her life, we will collect them into different chapters, beginning with faith, the basis and foundation of all holiness, without which, as the apostle says, "It is impossible to please God."* After Catherine received it in holy baptism, she loved and prized it to such a degree, that in order to show the world how much she longed to suffer for God, she would willingly have shed every drop of her blood, and given up her life; and although her state of life did not permit her to go and spread the gospel among the infidels, she encouraged this burning desire by meditating on the Passion of Jesus, which she did with such earnestness, that she burst into burning tears of compassion, and endeavoured to suffer as much as possible from the positions in which she placed her limbs, as described above. Nor was she satisfied with this, she despised all the riches,

* Heb. xi., v. 6.

luxuries, and ease, which the world offered her in an earthly marriage, and cast aside her parents in order to acquire by perpetual poverty the treasures of heaven; and as if all this seemed a small thing to her ardent spirit, she carried her prayers, mortifications, and corporal penances so far, that she at last became worthy to experience in herself the passion which our Redeemer suffered, as will be related hereafter, nor would she, in the whole course of her life, which lasted sixty-eight years, accept any other consolations than those which Heaven imparts to its favourite souls.

This lively faith enabled her to overcome all the snares that the world, the devil, and the flesh could contrive against her soul, and to live with such purity of manners that she never committed one grave sin that might obscure the glory of her heroic sanctity, which Heaven attested by pouring on her head a multitude of gifts and graces which are bestowed only on the most innocent souls.

The virtue of hope shone in her with no less brightness than that of faith, and by means of it she strove during her whole life to obtain celestial riches, and to overcome with free resignation to the will of her Divine Spouse, all the tribulations and persecutions which came in crowds from the beginning of it, to deter her from the true following of Christ. She ever trusted to His grace, which had power to preserve her from shipwreck, as we have seen hitherto, and persevered in this holy confidence during the remainder of her life, particularly when they sought to distract her, and divert her from the ecstasies which were the chan-

nels by which God communicated to her His most signal favours.

This firm hope in the Divine Mercy animated the prayers which she continually made to God, whether in her own necessities or those of the monastery which she governed for many years, or in her illnesses, by which she always obtained the wished-for consolation for herself and for her neighbour; indeed, many through her intercession were cured both in soul and body, and fortified by this, she prepared with a joyful heart to die, trusting through the mercy of God, whom she thus loved, to go to enjoy Him for all eternity.

Not content with exercising herself in acts of these two theological virtues, she made the greatest efforts that others should exercise them as well, exhorting all to fix their hopes on the Divine Mercy, and never to grow weary of asking from it whatever they desired, in the assurance that if it was withheld from them, it was more for their good, and if, after some delay, the favour was granted, the very delay would be beneficial to their own souls, as we shall see more distinctly by and by.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SAINT'S GREAT LOVE OF GOD.

If the other two theological virtues shone so brightly in Catherine, the lustre of her love of

God was not less, which, according to the apostle, is the instrument of faith, "It is faith that worketh by charity,"* for it is the origin and foundation of all our merits.

This love began in Catherine's heart when she first received from her guardian angel the knowledge of God, for she no sooner heard what He had done for her, and for all men, than like a thirsting hart, which traverses every meadow in search of a fountain where it may moderate its heat, she, although a child, fled from every lawful conversation that she might, alone in her oratory, give free scope to her love of God; and she sought the sacred cloisters only because she knew that in them it is easier to give expression to this love; and when her feet were stayed there she never ceased from praying with her mind or her lips, when she worked, moved, or employed herself in different ways, thus preserving and increasing this exceeding charity, without which she could not perform a single action. And, indeed, her actions were done in such a strange and extraordinary manner, that all easily perceived that her mind was quite rapt in God; for if she heard the divine mysteries mentioned, or spiritual books read, she immediately remained ecstatic, and quite unconscious of sense; and her soul was so drawn by love of her divine Spouse, that everything which she saw brought before her all the favours she received from God; and she meditated all the time that she recited the divine office in church with the other nuns, or assisted at mass; and it

* Ep. Gal. v 6.

seemed to her that multitudes of saints and angels were present, accompanying their supreme Lord. She was so inflamed by this holy love, that neither corporal movements nor the business of superioress of the monastery, could divert her thoughts for one moment from her Creator and Redeemer, and it so possessed her soul that it seemed impossible to her to live without God, and without making acts of fervent love of Him. She very often alleviated her love before her divine Spouse in the Blessed Sacrament, by shedding a flood of tears, and considering the excessive love of God, who found a means of remaining with us, concealed under that white species, for which she never could return sufficient thanks; she always hungered after that Eucharistic food, and almost every day was fed by it, with such extreme joy of her spirit, that she was then always rapt in ecstatic alienation from the senses, and confessed to her Spouse that her heart was so inflamed with His love that it was become nothing but love, and that she felt herself consumed and fainting from the heat of the fire which burnt within her; in fact, the nuns heard her exclaim, "O infinite love! O my Spouse, I have not deserved to love Thee so much, but from Thee, my Jesus, I have received such immense love. Yes, Thou, my God and my Redeemer, hast espoused this soul, inclined to all evil, full of all deformity, buried in every sin. My God, I am confounded at having received so many gifts from you."

In meditating the most holy Passion of Jesus, she frequently broke out in words of compassion,

and tenderness, such as these :—"How is it possible that I can behold such a cruel spectacle? how can my soul, O my Spouse, O my Love, endure to see Thee so cruelly tormented? Thou bearest it for love of me, I desire to be also tormented, and that Thou shouldest stand by to see how willingly I should suffer for Thee." Then she turned full of pity now to that sacred Head, now to that sacred Face, and now to the precious Blood, which she saw streaming from His veins, and was very often heard in her ecstasies to reproach the cruelty of the executioners who crucified Him, so that the compassion she felt for the sufferings of her and our Saviour was visible and intelligible to all, especially in the following circumstance :—

"Our Lord, intending to renew in Catherine the imitation of the mysteries of His most holy Passion, by making her experience it in part every week for twelve consecutive years, began to prepare her heart by a vivid representation of His torments, in the exact likeness of His death upon Calvary, which she saw on the 1st of April, 1541, when she was nineteen years old. After dinner, she went into the garden of the monastery to gain the indulgence granted by Paul III., the reigning Pontiff, to whoever should visit a holy crucifix in a little chapel in the garden once a week. As she approached it, she saw, to her great astonishment, three crosses in it, and our Lord Jesus Christ hanging on the middle one, covered with wounds and blood, and so bruised and suffering that she fainted away, and did not dare to look on Him ;

however, she raised her courage, and drew near to that sacred tree, and fixing her eyes on Him, she saw that it was indeed her Beloved who hung there ill-treated and disfigured; she saw His head pierced with sharp thorns, leaning forward so much on His breast that it seemed that the joints of the neck being broken, it rested on it alone. His sacred face was overshadowed by the paleness of death, foul with spittle, and covered with blood; His hair hung down on each side, full of blood, of which a quantity dropped upon the ground. His beard was dyed with blood, which fell from it, or congealed upon it. His breast was so much raised that all His ribs appeared dislocated, sweating blood all over, and in it there was a large open wound, made by a lance, which, as well as the hands and feet, pierced by the nails, poured forth so much blood that it formed a lake in the ground around which there stood some women weeping and mourning exceedingly, but the darkness, representing that which followed the death of Jesus, prevented her from recognising them. When Catherine saw this cruel spectacle she felt her heart burst with sorrow, and would have gone away, but the agony of her feelings had taken away all her bodily strength. After some time, her Spouse, to whom she recommended herself with the greatest fervour, renewed her vigour, and she returned trembling and sorrowful, to her cell, but her mind had received such a lively impression of the vision, that in unceasing grief and terror she remained in bed for ten days, unable to move."

This vision was so clear to her, that she thought, in her simplicity, that all the nuns had also seen it, so she spoke about it to some of them, and wondered how they could approach such a spectacle without falling ill; but when they answered they had not seen it, she perceived that it was a vision, granted by her Spouse, to her alone, and, therefore, she was filled with confusion at having disclosed it, more especially when, on returning to the same, she no longer beheld that piteous sight.

Some time passed before she could recover her strength, and on Holy Saturday, having made a great effort to leave her bed, she felt a little better, and was able to assist at the ceremonies of that day.

The following morning, the feast of the Resurrection, which was the 18th of April, in that year, 1541, she remained in the choir after matins, to pray, but she was attacked by such a violent and prolonged cough, that she was forced to go away, for fear of disturbing the other nuns, who were there in prayer; and when she was close to her cell, she saw a most beautiful lady issue from it, dressed in red, with her hair floating on her shoulders, who beckoned to her to hasten her steps, which she did, although at first frightened and anxious at seeing secular ladies in the monastery at that hour. As soon as she was in her cell, it was revealed to her that that lady was St. Mary Magdalen, her patroness, and that of the order; and she led her by the arm into the cell, where she had the happiness of

beholding her beloved Spouse, with wounds, no longer open and bleeding, but all resplendent with the brightest rays issuing from them. This vision filled Catherine's heart with joy, which greatly increased when she found that she was thought worthy to kiss His Sacred side, His hands, and His feet; and after the risen Redeemer had consoled her by discoursing upon His Passion and Resurrection, and given her various blessings for various graces which she had asked, and especially that neither she, nor any of her companions should be deceived by the devil, her shattered strength received so much support, that she felt perfectly healed, joyous and strong, and as soon as the bell of the choir rang, Jesus bade her farewell, that she might go to praise Him with the other sisters.

One of the effects of her excessive love of God was, that, as her mind was always united to Him, when a question was put to her she remained silent, or if she did reply, made an answer that was not to the purpose, which gave her the appearance of stupidity to the nuns, who had not yet penetrated the continual elevation of her mind to God, when the real cause was that which she explained herself to sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, to whom her confessor commanded that she should disclose whatever she asked. After having enquired over and over again what she was thinking of while she spoke to her, Catherine replied, "I think upon the excessive love which God has borne to all of us, and upon His immense favours, for which I continually thank Him, and I pray for myself and the benefactors of the monastery, for

our nuns, and for all those who have recommended themselves to my prayers, who am but a poor sinner."

In fact, she never spoke but of God, or with Him, or about Him, and every thing which presented itself to her eyes suggested the contemplation of some of His mysteries, as an event which happened on the Epiphany, 1565, clearly demonstrated. The Prince of Bavaria, who had been enjoined by the Duke, his father, to visit Catherine, entered the monastery with a numerous suite, and she went with him to the representation of the Crib at Bethlehem, and other pious places of the monastery, and reconducted him to the gate. The nuns who had been with her, perceived that she had been in ecstasy, and unconscious the whole time, for when they reminded her of the answers she had made to the Prince, she said, showing great astonishment, that she could not remember any thing of his visit, for she imagined that she had accompanied to the Crib the three Holy Kings whose memory was celebrated that day by their Holy Mother the Church, and she had never thought of any thing else.

Another time, when sister Catherine went with her guardian, sister Mary Magdalen, into the garden, she saw an apple, and upon that began to discourse, from its union with the tree of how close our union with God ought to be; for, as every apple owes all its taste and smell to the tree, we owe all that we have of good to God, from whom, if we separate ourselves before death, we have great reason to fear for our salvation, just as the

apples wither immediately, if they fall from the tree before they are ripe. Lastly, she observed, that if God preserves and nourishes the plants, He much more preserves and nourishes us, not only by creating every thing for our service, but also by sacrificing Himself for love of us.

On another occasion, one Friday, when she had returned to her senses, after her long ecstasy of twenty-eight hours, which we shall speak of in its proper place, she went down to the garden with her guardian, and the purple colour of a violet which she saw, recalled to her mind so strongly the most precious blood of her Redeemer, that, beginning to speak of it, she immediately went into an ecstasy, and remained for two whole hours in the position she was in when it began, although so little time had elapsed since her recovery from her great one, which astonished not only her guardian, but the other sisters as well, who remained with her till it was night, and then, seeing that she did not recover, grieved very much, because they knew that she had not eaten any thing since dinner, on Thursday, and had taken no rest after the other ecstasy ; however, at the expiration of two hours, she returned to her senses, to their great satisfaction, and went back with them into the monastery.

In fine, she not only exhorted all until she died, to love God with their whole souls, by her words, her prayers, and ecstasies, but still more by her aspect, which breathed devotion and heavenly love, and inflamed the hearts of others, with the desire to give themselves entirely to Him.

CHAPTER VII.

HER PRAYERS, DEVOTIONS, FASTINGS, AND PENANCES.

As soon as Catherine had made her profession, she devoted herself to following the Apostolic precept,* "Pray without ceasing." Her fervour was not satisfied with the community prayers, which she made in choir with the other nuns, but she incessantly recited prayers, hymns, psalms, rosaries, and her other devotions, as was seen by the perpetual movement of her lips, in all her actions, no matter whether she worked or exercised herself in any manual employment, or whether she spoke with others on the things which were necessary to the monastery, (she never spoke on other subjects,) or whether she went about the monastery on business; and she paid so much attention to her prayer, that when a question was put to her, she continued it after having given an answer, which fact was remarked by several nuns.

Neither did any occupation divert her mind from the devotion and attention required by prayer, because she had embraced from her childhood, and persevered in it till her last breath, a perpetual and devout prayer, which was her only study, not at intervals or with interruptions,

* Ep. 1. Thess. c. 5. v. 17.

but so continuous that it had become, so to speak, part of her nature.

Not content with practising herself in these holy exercises, she invited the others to the same by devout exhortations and discourses, and to facilitate it, she got an oratory made at the head of each dormitory, and a beautiful chapel in the garden, built after the model of the house of Loretto. By these holy methods she enriched her soul in the contemplation of the Divine bounty and benefits, which excludes all presumption, makes us live in fear of falling into various faults, and reminds us how earnestly and incessantly we must pray God to keep us from them.

These holy exercises made themselves known by the numerous raptures and ecstasies which she had in almost every time and place, and the shortness of the repose which she allowed her body, that she might, as she confided to her faithful guardian, spend all the remainder of the day in prayers for herself and her neighbours, and principally for sinners.

And because abstinence and fasting greatly assist in making the spirit freer to follow its devotion, she inured herself to them from her earliest years, leaving a part of those dishes which pleased her most, and often depriving herself of what was necessary, and this she managed so skilfully that it was hardly to be perceived by others. After she had taken the religious habit she observed the fast days of the rule with such rigour, that she would not accept any dispensation offered her by the superiors, unless

forced by obedience, as was the case in her illness, when the physicians and superiors ordered that she should eat meat on Monday and Wednesday, which is prohibited by the Constitutions of the Third Order.

Still she was not satisfied by simple abstinence from flesh on those days, and she abstained from all food as often as possible, and left the common table without having broken her fast; and if she did touch anything, it was in such a small quantity that her fellow novices, who were near her, were much astonished; those at a distance could not perceive anything, so much art did she use in concealing her abstemiousness.

Knowing how very little nourishment she took, they could not understand how she could be so ready to fulfil all the duties of her state, and the first of all in alacrity; and they began to suspect that she satisfied her hunger in secret, and mentioned their suspicions to Sister Margaret, mistress of the novices, who charged them, and some of the other novices, to watch her carefully in her cell, and even in the oratory, whither she frequently resorted to pray, and she did the same herself; but all these observations only exposed the hollowness of their suspicions, and made them quite certain that she lived upon the little she took in the refectory. The mistress of novices was next moved to compassion at her sufferings, and fearing lest this rigid abstinence might bring on a severe illness, or incapacitate her for the duties of the monastery, ordered her companions to bring her some food, of which

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she refused to partake, but did so as soon as the mistress commanded her to take it under the name of breakfast or luncheon. After having eaten a part, she entreated the mistress not to force her to go on eating, and then having obtained her permission and her blessing, she withdrew into the oratory, to return thanks to the Lord for the kindness of her mistress.

On the 7th of May 1542, when she was 20 years old, the Redeemer of the world appeared to her, and commanded her for the future to abstain entirely from flesh, eggs, and things made with milk, and to live only on Lenten food and common bread, and because God never imposes commands on us which are above our strength, He told her that He would give her all the assistance necessary for its execution.

Catherine received and fulfilled this command with great joy, and lived solely on herbs and vegetables, or a little very common fish during the remaining forty-eight years of her life, nor would she dispense herself from it even in her illnesses, when the only thing she would take in addition was turtle-soup.

She would not impart this precept to any one, and by her strict adherence to it, even when she was ill, brought upon herself the charge of caprice, superstition, and ignorance, and even of being deluded by the devil.

Catherine's zeal was much pained by the murmurs and evil opinions of her, not indeed because she who allowed and confessed that she was a great sinner, grieved at being blamed, but

because the uneasiness which her rigid abstinence caused in the convent was the occasion of several faults committed by her companions, and the more because her humility prevented her from revealing the command of Heaven, therefore she threw herself in great distress at the feet of her Spouse Jesus Christ, praying with great earnestness that without revealing that it was His command she might no longer be an occasion of sin to her sisters.

Her Divine Spouse did not delay His consolations, for the nuns, more irritated on the one hand, because in spite of all reproaches, she persevered in her abstinence from the food which our Lord forbade her to eat, and, on the other, considering her great goodness, began to think that the case might be what it was in reality, and communicated this idea to each other, in order to be certain of it, persuaded the superiors to command her to eat meat at least when she was ill; and it was not difficult to insinuate the same wish to the doctors, who, on one occasion, pronounced it necessary for her. She executed the order punctually, merely protesting that this food would be very dangerous to her health, and ate it with the certainty that she would have to suffer the sharpest pains in swallowing it, while radishes, cabbages, or other ordinary vegetables would have done her a great deal of good. This was proved by the event, for as soon as the broth reached her stomach, her face was all inflamed, and her breast was so swelled, that it was evident she suffered the greatest pain till she threw it up,

and the doctors and sisters having seen this, perceived that her abstinence was the will of God, and never again ordered her to break it.

In spite of all this evidence, some of the nuns who were not quite satisfied, continued to hide a little pounded meat in her food, but when it produced exactly the same effects, they were convinced by their own proofs, and left off disturbing her for ever.

God confirmed this truth by signs, as, for instance, on one very rainy day, when the cook had nothing to give her, and was very unhappy about it, she went to the well to draw some water, and pulled up a great fish hanging to the bucket, which sufficed for the saint and for several others, and this caused great astonishment, for no more fishes were ever found in the well, and it was generally considered a work of the Divine Providence to help Catherine, who returned thanks with the others to the Giver of all good.

Besides this abstinence on Wednesday and Friday, and on the Vigils of Feasts, she often fasted on bread and water, but her superiors finally commanded her to give it up, her strength being so exhausted by the penances she performed.

Catherine added night-watchings to these fasts for the mortification of her flesh; she did not sleep more than three or four hours, and even this seemed too long to her spirit, enamoured of God, because it prevented her from giving vent to her feelings by praying and performing works

of charity for the nuns who were ill, and so she gradually diminished her sleep to one hour in a whole week, as was observed by her guardian; and once as Father Tommaso Neri attests, she passed a whole week without any sleep, which would have been impossible without the hand of God, which showed its great power in Catherine, as she herself told her guardian, who interrogated her on the subject, replying, "God is able to do this, and He wills that so little sleep should give me more support than the seven hours every night, which the order allows you."

Beside the aforesaid penances, Catherine tormented her limbs with sharp sackcloth, and the prickles were so sharp, that although she put a quantity of doubled linen over it, the woollen clothes which she wore were often stained with blood, which was seen by the lay sisters who washed them. She moreover disciplined herself to blood every night with an iron chain, and to the confusion of her profound humility, the noise was heard by the sisters who had adjoining cells, but was particularly manifested one night, in which, while she was scourging herself, the devil attempting as usual to frighten and deter her from doing so, began to mimic her, striking underneath the floor of her cell with such a noise, that it awakened and terrified her two neighbours, sister Maria Cini, and sister Speranda Pandolfini, who ran into her cell, and when they heard the servant of God's lamentation, brought a light to see who was there. They found no one, and enquired from her what was the reason of such a noise, and

she answered that it could not have been caused by any one but the devil, and therefore begged them to sprinkle the cell with holy water, which they did, and recited several prayers with her; but the noise still continuing, and evidently proceeding from the floor, one of the nuns, by the advice of this blessed servant of God, prostrated herself at full length upon the spot whence the noise came, and the proud slave of Lucifer not being able to endure such humility, went away howling and covered with confusion, not only at having failed in gaining his end, but at having made manifest Catherine's penances, whose mangled appearance moved the two sisters, and all those who ran there when they heard what was happening. The monastery still keeps the disciplines which were formally recognized to have belonged to her, at the processes upon her virtues and miracles, and which were found quite bloody.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER ECSTASIES AND RAPTURES.

CATHERINE'S heart burnt so warmly with the love of her Divine Spouse, that like the spirit of Ezechiel, it frequently raised itself to heaven to enjoy the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, which

is indeed, as the angelic doctor St. Thomas, taught the effect of perfect charity.*

She had similar ecstasies and raptures so often, that her life might almost be said to be a continued ecstasy; they began when she was a little child in her father's house, as she affirmed to her uncle and confessor, and went on till her last breath; they lasted many hours, sometimes six, eight, or ten, besides one occasion, when she was in a rapture for twenty-eight hours.

Her spirit was immediately absorbed in God, and she became ecstatic whenever she heard God spoken of, or when she placed herself in His presence, in choir or in church, or in an oratory in the monastery, so that her superiors were obliged to give her her meals in a separate place from the others, and to make her receive the Holy Eucharist apart from the others, for she always was an impediment to them in these functions; she would become unable to move to the grate to be communicated; she would be absorbed in an ecstasy, so to leave her corporal food untouched for several hours, on hearing spiritual books read in the refectory.

She was surprised by an ecstasy in the same manner when she heard the Salve Regina sung after Complin, or when she kissed the crucifix or relics of saints on solemn festivals, and invariably

* Ezechiel viii. v. 3. And the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the vision of God into Jerusalem. S. Thos. 2, 2, qu. 171, art. 1 in cor. The mind which is united in the bond of perfect charity, is raised by the Holy Spirit to supernatural things, and by being abstracted from sensible things, arrives at the highest contemplation of divine charity.

when a nun was in her agony ; in fact, there was no place or time when she was free from them, but as she ever kept her mind raised to God, and exercised herself in fervent acts of love towards Him, her spirit was ever and in all places ready to be ravished to God. Her spirit was totally carried away by these ecstasies and seemed to desert her body altogether, so that when they occurred she remained without sense and perfectly immoveable, not feeling anything, and not even yielding to any attempts or force used to move her ; her eyes were always open, and fixed with motionless eyelids upon heaven, or some sacred picture; her face was sometimes rather pale, but was generally of a beautiful red colour, and it always shone and had such a venerable appearance, that it seemed more like the face of a seraphim than of a mortal, and excited great devotion in those who beheld it.

The Duchess Leonora of Toledo, wife of Cosmo the First, with her court, witnessed this in the following manner. The great fame of Catherine's sanctity having reached her ears, she went to Prato to see her, and arrived in the monastery with some of her ladies at the time that sister Catherine was in her ecstasy of twenty-eight hours. As soon as they heard that she was in that state, they went to see her, and watched her for some time with great astonishment. Then the duchess wishing to see whether her body was really immoveable, tried with all her might to shake her neck and her hands, but could not succeed, and turning to her ladies, and to the nuns who were present, she said, "What one sees

one must believe, but if we relate all that we have seen, and have ourselves proved, to my lord the duke, he will say that it is only feminine piety and devotion, although we see it with our own eyes, and touch it with our own hands." And in order to be able to attest the fact more certainly to her escort, she begged the prioress to allow her to bring the Bishop of Forlì, Don Pietro Angiolo Morsi, her cousin, master of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, and her major-domo, Baccio Lanfredini, who were in her suite, into the monastery, to be witnesses to this prodigy, to which the prioress consented, with the approbation of the prior and the confessor, who were present, because at that period there was no strict enclosure. These persons were struck with admiration and astonishment when they beheld her body motionless, her eyes fixed, and the brightness which issued from her face, and at the same time an effectual desire was aroused in their hearts of amending their lives, as they explained to the nuns: they congratulated them on the possession of such a treasure of sanctity, and did not fail to carry their resolution into effect. Nor was this the only time that the immovability of her body was proved, it was already known to the nuns who had experienced it on many occasions, one of which we will describe. Catherine was one day in an ecstasy behind the door that opened into the outer church, which was afterwards shut up. She was in the habit of resorting thither to pray, that she might be nearer to the most holy sacrament of the altar, which she adored and looked

at, and more hidden from the eyes of others. It happened that some young girls were bringing a portable ladder into the church in a great hurry, and they pushed at the door with violence, so that it struck the saint's head and shut to again, and when they found that they could not open it, they looked to see what prevented them, and to their great distress found that it was sister Catherine in an ecstasy. They were much confused at having given her such a blow, and went to relate the whole matter to her guardian, that she might go and see whether her head was hurt. She went directly to see, and found that her head was not wounded, but livid from the blow, and when she returned to her senses after some time, she felt a pain in her head without knowing the reason, so that she might justly say with the apostle, when he was rapt in spirit to the third heaven, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth."*

Another wonderful part of Catherine's ecstasies was, that she always remained in the exact position she was in when they came on; thus, if they began when she was standing she remained standing, if she was kneeling she remained kneeling, and if she was walking she went on walking. In these ecstasies she was made a partaker in the joy and in the sight of the principal mysteries of our holy faith. She frequently saw the Incarnation of the Word, but more particularly once in her cell, on the 25th of March, 1542, where she remained in this condition for three hours, when

*Cor. 2, ch. xii., v. 2 and 3.

some doubts of hers were made clear, and it was revealed to her how the archangel Gabriel entered to announce our Lord's birth to the virgin at the setting of the sun, and when about the sixth hour of the night she consented, the Eternal word became incarnate; and how the archangel remained until morning in holy conversation with the B. Virgin.

In the same year, on Palm Sunday, after Catherine had received a palm, she fell into a rapture which lasted during the remainder of the Divine office, and she accompanied our Lord, in spirit, through all the mysteries of Bethphage, and that of Mount Olivet, and rejoiced greatly at beholding those holy places at Jerusalem, as she herself disclosed to her confessor and her guardian.

On the following Feast of St. Vincent Ferrer, she was introduced into our Lord's presence in heaven, who showed her all the saints and beatified members of her order.

On the Assumption she had the happiness of beholding the B. Virgin, accompanied by a crowd of angels, who carried her up to heaven; she also saw her on her Nativity, Purification, and Presentation in the Temple, besides others of her festivals, which we pass over for the sake of brevity.

But the most striking feature of Catherine's supernatural gifts was that, when an ecstasy came on, while she walked, she went on walking without the slightest impediment; for instance, during the Prince of Bavaria's visit, which we have related above; and as we are going to describe, while she

carried the crucifix in the three processions commanded by our Lord, on the 21st of August, 1542.

On that day, after communion, she fell into an ecstasy, which lasted two hours; and after that, she returned to her cell. On entering it, she heard a voice say, "My spouse," and, turning to see whence it proceeded, she was surprised and confused by seeing the crucifix in relievo, which she kept, about the height of a *braccio* above her little altar, leaning forward to her with open eyes, and unnailed hands, whereupon she knelt down, and stretched out her arms to prevent its falling on the ground, and the crucifix embraced Catherine in that attitude; she immediately became ecstatic, and remained thus, in its embrace, a long time. Her guardian came in and found her in this posture, and called the other nuns directly, who informed the prior and confessor. They all shed tears of joy and tenderness at this sight, and at the sweet odour which filled the room; they had the great pleasure of kissing her hand, and then, by the advice of her guardian, who well knew how much it would grieve her humility to find them round her when she returned to her senses, retired. Jesus shewed her in this ecstasy how pleasing her prayers were to Him, and commanded her, on that account, not to cease from praying for sinners, against whom He was very wrathful, and added, that to appease His anger, she was to inform her superiors that it was His will that all the nuns should assist at three processions that should be made in the monastery. As soon as Catherine returned to her senses, she

manifested this command to her superiors, who without losing time, fixed the following day, the 12th of August for the first procession, at which the prior and the confessor assisted, as well as another father in sacred vestments, who carried the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Catherine carried this same crucifix, and she had hardly taken it into her hands when an ecstasy began, which lasted all the time of the procession, as the nuns carefully remarked; she seemed to their eyes rather to be carried by an angel than to walk, and, indeed, it was wonderful to see her going in procession round the whole monastery and further, for, without ever stopping, she went into the room of a sick nun, and blessed her with a crucifix. Still, in rapture, she went down again with them into the church, and knelt down taking care to place the crucifix on one side, so as to allow her to see the Blessed Sacrament. Benediction was given by the prior, after which Catherine returned to her senses, and addressing herself to her guardian, said, "What are we doing here; why do we not begin the procession?" and when she heard that it was over, she went to her cell full of joy at the accomplishment of the will of God. This question confirmed the nuns' belief that she had been in ecstasy during the procession.

She was similarly rapt in ecstasy in the other processions on the two following days; she thought she was unworthy to carry the crucifix, and tried to be exempted from that office; but her guardian, who knew her humility, told her that it properly belonged to the lay-sisters, which was enough to make her carry it with great joy.

When she was prioress, she was in a rapture at the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday. Before she girded herself for this function she knelt down, and, raising her eyes to heaven, thanked the Eternal Father who had brought her to this hour, and then she placed her arms on her breast, and humbly bent down to the earth for some minutes; she made the sign of the cross over it, and kissed it; and then prepared herself for the washing, at which she immediately fell into an ecstasy. Although the sight of her in this condition gave great joy to the nuns, they never could get over the confusion of seeing such a beloved servant of God at their feet.

Her most wonderful and astonishing ecstasy was repeated every week; it began about two on Thursday afternoon, and ended at six o'clock on Friday evening; and she passed these twenty-eight hours on her knees, raised however from the ground, without moving, and without food or rest. To hide this favour from the eyes of others she used to retire into a separate and solitary cell, and shut the door; but this was not enough to prevent the nuns and many of the nobility, whom the fame of the great ecstasy drew to the monastery, from seeing her in it very many times. A great number of persons were very desirous of seeing this prodigy, and went to Prato for this purpose; but the superiors were unwilling to allow any one to enter, and only made exceptions in favour of persons of very high rank. Catherine continued to have this remarkable rapture weekly for twelve years, from the month of February,

1542, when she was only nineteen years old, until she was thirty-one, in 1554. It ceased at the repeated prayers of herself and the nuns, who could not endure any longer the great concourse of people whom its fame brought to the monastery It was evident from her words and actions in this ecstasy, that she beheld the whole passion of Jesus Christ; her actions showed it by conforming themselves to its mysteries; she was seen to move her shoulders, her arms, and all her members, as if she received the blows of the scourge; she moved her head from side to side, as if she were crowned with thorns; and she stretched out her arms, and put her feet one upon the other, as was done to Jesus on the cross.

But her words were the strongest confirmation of this supposition, which shewed which mystery she contemplated, and by which the series of the revelations that were made to her on the Passion was known. They began with the words spoken by Jesus to His Virgin Mother, when He bade her farewell, and ended at His being taken down from the cross. This was all described by her guardian and the nuns who witnessed it, but we omit it for the sake of brevity.

In this and her other ecstasies, Catherine often spoke in the person of Jesus, or of His most holy Mother, or of St. Dominic; sometimes in her own person, as did S. Frances, S. Catherine of Sienna, and S. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, and she always exhorted the nuns to observe the rules and constitutions which they professed, and to fulfil their vows, with such profound reasoning, with so many

quotations from Holy Scripture, and such lofty ideas (these are the expressions of those who heard them), that it was easy to see that they were not the sentiments of a woman who did not understand Latin, and was still less versed in the sacred Scriptures, and in theology.

At other times she was heard to break forth in words of tenderness and compassion towards her Spouse Jesus; and sometimes it appeared from them that she suffered the Passion with Jesus, for she often prayed the Lord to dispense her from these sufferings, and then immediately resigned herself to His most holy will, as she did with a loud voice in the year 1542; and went on to exhort the nuns in the person of Jesus, and reproved them for their tepidity in serving Him, and encouraged them to fly to Him in all their wants; to be humble and obedient to their superiors, and grateful to God.

She was once heard to say in an ecstasy, "O my Spouse, I faint under the weight of the cross, help me; now what will become of Thee who dost feel it, and art so delicate? O my dear nuns, you are not all devoted to Jesus," and she went on to excite them to acts of compassion towards Him, and afterwards addressed herself to sinners, reproaching them for their great ingratitude towards Jesus.

In another she was heard to thank the Lord for the gifts He had granted to herself and to the nuns, and asked pardon for her own faults and for those of each of the others, and ended by recommending many others in particular. She always

prayed for the remission of sins; in one of her ecstasies she begged of God to give her adequate words to thank Him for the great gift He has made to the world in being pleased to leave Himself on the earth in the Eucharistic species.

She never forgot to pray her Spouse Jesus to have special care of her lest she should be deceived, and she said that although she had received many gifts from Him, she feared being left to the devil's stratagems, in punishment for the sins she might have committed. On the 13th of October, 1553, she exhorted the nuns in the person of Jesus, to take up the cross of regular observance, which they seem to have thought little of; for it was this neglect which prevented Him from conferring the same graces on them as He had on her, and not to be frightened at His corrections. After a short pause she continued to speak in her own person, and exhorted herself and the others to abandon their peculiar faults by way of preparation for the feast of St. Ursula. She made another discourse on the 3rd of December following, giving them a preparation for Christmas.

It was her custom in these discourses, and in many others which she made in her ecstasies, but which the space of this book does not allow us to relate, to vary her voice according to that of the person she represented; and all these discourses were taken down and registered by some of the other nuns who copied them into the manuscript we shall speak of by and by. In fine, it is clear that she suffered the passion with Jesus;

when she was in ecstasy, the nuns saw in her the marks of the scourging of the crowning with thorns, the crucifixion, and the marks of the nails, and they could see when the crown of thorns was taken off her head and the ropes were loosened, as they were from the body of Jesus when it was taken down from the cross; and some of these were never after effaced.

It is obvious from all this, and from her great humility, the virtue most hostile to Lucifer, the zeal for the salvation of souls with which she spoke, her untiring admonitions to the nuns, and the passion of Jesus which she contemplated and experienced in a rapture twenty-eight hours long, added to the continual prayers she made, that God might not allow her to be deceived, but rather take away these visions and ecstasies if they did not proceed from Himself, and that He would forgive her sins and those of others, that these ecstasies were not the effects of a diabolical illusion, but, on the contrary, were favours and graces granted by God's great love for her. Besides, the nuns never ceased to pray that God would be pleased to show whether they were delusions or not.

Their truth is, moreover, confirmed by this fact, that when our Saint was in ecstasy, she neither heard nor saw anything; if any one approached her and asked her for a spiritual favour, she blessed them, as a pledge that she would obtain it, and what was still more astonishing was, that when there were five or six or more persons in the room, she gave each her blessing as they each asked for

a grace, without once moving her eyes, as was experienced by many of the nuns and some fathers. Once Father Michellozzi, Father Strozzi, and Father Cini were in her room together, and the two first received her blessing, once their having asked for a favour, but she blessed Father Cini twice, because, as he explained, when the others showed surprise at her apparent partiality, he had demanded two favours. Many of the nuns testified that if she did not bless the person who entreated her intercession, she sought her out when she returned to her senses, and told her that she had prayed to God for the grace she wished for; and she also understood what the favours were, which were only asked for mentally, without using words or actions, to which sister Raffaella Cini bore the most convincing testimony, as will be seen from the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

EXAMINATIONS OF CATHERINE'S SPIRIT.

Many years passed before the nuns and their confessors attributed Catherine's extasies to their real source. In order to hide the true favours of Heaven, she called her ecstasies in her humility drowsiness and sleepiness, and indulged a hope, which she confided to her companions, and particularly to her guardian, that she would be able

to hide them until her death. In order to confirm her words, she was in the habit of begging the sisters who saw her in that condition, to excuse her when this sleepiness prevented her from being as alive and prompt as they were in fulfilling their monastic duties.

Her strict silence, as to their true nature, gave free scope to the doubts of the sisters and of the confessors, who thought that they were fainting-fits, or a failing of the heart, caused by the delicacy of her constitution, while many among them, considering how pre-occupied her mind always was, and what incoherent answers she was in the habit of making, attributed them to stupidity, produced by her excessive abstinence from food and sleep.

But God, who would not allow his favours to remain any longer hidden under a bushel, wished to place her upon a candlestick, that her virtues might be universally recognized, and be a light and a guide to all. Thus, in the year 1541, the many graces she had received, her numerous ecstasies, and the splendours which frequently issued from her face during them, made the nuns begin to doubt whether their suspicions were not empty, and the more they weighed the fact, that in her ecstasies and raptures she never grew pale, or livid, or fell on the ground, and shut her eyes, as people usually do when they faint, neither did she struggle or foam at the mouth, as she would have done had they been epileptic fits, but remained standing, kneeling, walking, or in whatever posture she was in when her spirit was lifted

up from the earth, quite insensible, but with open eyes, a shining countenance, with a brilliant and burning colour, inspiring devotion, in all who beheld her, the more they were persuaded that they were rather divine than human, and more like privileges granted by God's love, than faintings, stupidity, or sleepiness.

Nevertheless, the sisters, well aware how much caution is necessary to decide on such a case, resolved together to declare all they knew on the subject, to Father T. Ricci, their confessor, who, although he knew the purity of his niece's conscience was also aware how easily any one can be deceived in this discernment of spirits, and resolved to make an examination. In the first place, he commanded them to conceal from every person external to the monastery, the signs that they noticed in the saint during her ecstasies, and to make devout prayers to the Most high, in public and in private, that He might condescend to reveal to them, whether sister Catherine's were true ecstasies or diabolical illusions.

Then he sent for his niece, who came immediately, and reproved her severely for having concealed these facts, noticed by the nuns, from him, and when he had explained to her how easy it is to be deluded by the devil in the case of ecstasies, commanded her to manifest clearly and distinctly, to him, all she saw in these ecstasies. Catherine's humility was much distressed by the command she received and by the fear that was suggested that they might be diabolical illusions; but she obeyed, after having asked pardon for having concealed

them from him; she ingenuously confessed that she had never so much as doubted that they might be a stratagem of the devil, and described minutely everything she saw in them. She said that she was frequently conducted into the presence of God, where she saw wonderful and celestial things, and that she beheld the whole series of the sufferings of Jesus, all the ill-treatment and the torments He endured; all the contempt and injury, and every circumstance of the Passion, until His death and taking down from the cross, adding, that the Passion was felt by her, and that many mysteries were revealed to her in these raptures, and the state of souls for which she prayed. Further she informed him that she was frequently awakened or called, and the B. Virgin, with her Divine Son, appeared to her, and remained to speak with her, and to instruct her in the spiritual life, that their first appearance terrified her greatly, but that afterwards she was much consoled.

When her confessor heard this, his fears were changed into extreme joy, for having been instructed in the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, S. Thomas, he was convinced that they were not diabolical deceptions, because they are always followed by terror, yet he would not make known his judgment to his niece, but gave her a grave and charitable admonition, to impress on her mind the great danger there is in false visions, which would, under borrowed forms, be nets and precipices by which the devil might make her his slave.

He also enquired at what period of her life she

began to participate in these visions, ecstasies, and raptures, and she answered that they began when she was a baby, in her father's house, and related them to him one by one, and when he had heard them, he told her that whenever she went into an ecstasy in future, she was to make the sign of the cross, and spit upon whatever object presented itself.

Catherine was surprised on hearing this, and said, with the greatest humility and reverence, "Must I then spit upon Jesus, and Mary, and other saints who appear to me? Oh my father, how can I do so? I beseech you to change this order, or to give me some other means of ascertaining whether they proceed from God, or our infernal enemy." Her confessor severely blamed this speech, and assured her that if her visions were in reality of God and His saints, they would not be offended by an act of simple obedience, which is a virtue dear to God, and to the saints, but that if the visions proceeded from the devil, who detests and abhors obedience, it would be insupportable to his pride, and he would fly in confusion and shame. He repeated his injunction, and added, that she should relate to him each day whatever she saw in ecstasy, and to her guardian, but to no one else, and more particularly to no one out of the monastery.

The confessor was not satisfied to rely on his own prudence, but when he had given these instructions to his niece, he communicated the whole to Father Tommaso Masi, the existing prior of the convent and monastery, who approved of what he

had done, and agreed with him that a singular vigilance should be used in observing the saint's conduct and virtues, the perfection of which was the only certain proof of her receiving favours from heaven. They directed the most experienced nuns to keep a careful and minute watch over her life and manners.

It is impossible to describe the exactness with which these zealous mothers examined every step, word, and action, and they weighed and considered them in the most rigorous manner, but they were much consoled to find her simple, abject, humble, despising herself, obedient, most careful in observing the constitutions, and filled with charity towards God and her neighbour, and persuaded themselves with good reason that they were celestial gifts, the more so because in proportion as the prayers that God would make manifest the truth were multiplied, Catherine's ecstasies and heavenly visions increased.

The saint was very soon relieved from all fear of being deceived by the devil, for in the same year, 1541, soon after she had received her confessor's directions, when she was in her cell on Christmas night, before going to matins, the most holy Virgin appeared to her, accompanied by S. Mary Magdalen and S. Thomas Aquinas, holding the Divine Infant in her arms, and she said to her, "Catherine, I have brought thee thy Spouse, whom thou desirest so much to behold." Catherine was so terrified lest it should be an illusion of the enemy, that she fell trembling to the ground, but reviving her courage, she raised herself again

and made the sign of the cross in obedience to her confessor, then she prepared to spit, but did not venture for reverence to do so, until the Virgin told her that she was to execute what she had been told, and when she found that the vision still continued, she was filled with consolation, being assured it was a true one, the more so as the B. Virgin assured her that it was not an illusion of the devil, and exhorted her to fix her eyes on her divine Spouse, and to consider that He willed to be born for the salvation of sinners in a rough and cold season, and in a hut where He had no shelter from the frost of the season. When Catherine heard this, not content with gazing most tenderly upon Him, she entreated His most holy Mother to give Him into her own arms, which she did to Catherine's exceeding joy, and thus Catherine gave way to her love for the Infant Jesus, and asked for many favours, which He bestowed; then turning to the Virgin, she begged her to tell her how she might best please her divine Son, and the Virgin replied that she should conform herself with profound humility to His will, and obey her superiors blindly, which were the two virtues that shone most conspicuously in that Redeemer whom she held in her arms, and then asked Catherine to give her back her Infant, and the vision immediately disappeared. Catherine went straight to the crib to return thanks for all the favours she had received, particularly in that holy night, and was in an ecstasy for many hours after receiving Holy Communion.

All these, added to her obedience, and the vir-

tues so entirely opposed to the proud maxims of Lucifer, which she learnt in them, are proofs that the visions and conversations she had had were not illusions.

In spite of all the caution used, and the nuns being forbidden to speak of Catherine's privileges out of the cloister, it was impossible to hide them from the world, for the young persons who were educated there, and other persons necessary for the service of the monastery, who went to and fro were not bound by the prohibition, and they spoke occasionally of the ecstasies they had seen her in; for she had them continually in every place, so that the fame of them began to spread.

Father Francesco Romeo da Castiglione, who was Prior of the Roman Province, and subsequently General of the order, and distinguished himself by his learning and prudence at the Council of Trent, was much displeased when he heard of it, fearing that if these visions were false they would bring discredit on the monastery, and on the order, and went without delay to Prato, in February, 1542, and desired at once to be informed of the whole affair, by the Prior and Confessor. His uneasiness increased when they told him of her visions, which required a very advanced state of perfection unless it was a most special gift of heaven, and that she was between nineteen and twenty years old; for he suspected that they had by too much indulgence allowed her to be far advanced in a diabolical deceit, and resolved, at any cost, to remedy the evil by punishing sister Catherine severely in case he found her deceived

on the smallest point. He therefore sent for her and blamed her severely for giving credit to these ecstasies and visions, saying that they were novelties and charms, and that unless she ceased to have them he was resolved to punish her, for they appeared to him entirely false. The servant of God was not at all shaken by this, but answered with great humility and gentleness, that for her weakness and imperfections she well deserved to be deluded by the devil, wherefore she always entreated the Divine Majesty to give her his holy assistance that she might not be deceived, and to cause these ecstasies and favours to cease entirely unless they came from His hand, but that if they were from God, she might be deprived of light and intellect wherewith to reject them ; and, in fact it was not in her power to stop them ; that she had prayed also that if they were His gifts He would multiply them interiorly, and hide them from the eyes of others; and because she knew that she did not deserve to be heard, she had repeatedly begged the sisters to obtain by their prayers what hers could not. It was commonly reported at the time that these answers were suggested to her by her special advocate St. Thomas Aquinas.

The provincial clearly saw the spirit of truth in these words, but would not show it, leaving her in expectation of further trials. Nevertheless, the servant of God never lost her meekness and placidity at the threats which were made of putting her in prison ; indeed, she said, with respect to them to her guardian, that if the provincial put her in prison to stop her sleepiness, for she still called

them by this humble name, it should be a narrow and bad one, as her faults deserved, and she only prayed her not to confine her in a dark one, lest she should be frightened. The provincial examined her over and over again, and always finding her more humble and mortified, and entertaining the lowest ideas of herself, was strengthened in the opinion he had lately formed of her goodness; for he knew that persons deluded by the devil are proud, and by no means enamoured of God, nor of suffering for Him, as the answers of the servant of God frequently showed her to be; and he was quite satisfied after he had seen her sometimes in ecstasy, and had heard the exhortations she then made, which could not have been suggested by the devil.

He did not tell her that he was undeceived, so she asked him to tell her plainly what he thought of her sleepiness and dreams, because he ought not, being superior, to leave this his sheep in the claws of the infernal wolf, and the father whose mind was inflamed by the love of God, which he felt to be exhaled from her words, could not help telling her, that a soul which loved God as much as he saw she did, could not be deceived in any way by Satan, and he gave her, as his parting advice, a recommendation to persevere in blind obedience to her superiors. He left Prato, and spoke kindly of her to all, confessed to several persons that he had acquired great spiritual profit in talking to her, and praised the bounty of God, whose hand he clearly recognized in this matter.

When the provincial returned to Rome, he

made an exact report of Catherine's virtues and ecstasies, and of the favours she had received, to the father general of the order, who was then the Padre Maestro Alberto Casaus, who, in order to be sure of the truth of the provincial's report, went himself to Prato, and had the consolation of finding her in an ecstasy, and of speaking to her after it, and having thus assured himself of her holiness, he published it in Spain, where he next went, as appeared from the letters which came from thence to ask for her prayers.

The same thing happened to Father Angelo Diaceto, vicar general of the order, whom St. Pius V. subsequently created Bishop of Fiesole, who when he heard of Catherine's wonderful works, went to see her, and examined her rigourously, and after a long scrutiny was much edified by her humility, obedience, and piety; he had also the good fortune of seeing her stigmata, and from that time spoke of her with much reverence and devotion.

In the same manner Monsignor Jacopo Nacchianti, of the order of Preachers, Bishop of Chioggia, who was incredulous at first, was convinced by a strict investigation, and proclaimed her to be a vessel of the Holy Ghost, as did Father Tommaso da Samminiato, in 1545, who became prior of the convent of St. Dominic at Prato, and although he thought that his predecessors had been too lenient in their examinations of her, after having examined her himself, was so convinced of the truth of her spirit, that he recommended himself to her prayers in all

his necessities; and because a great concourse of strangers came to the monastery to speak to her, he advised the nuns to make her sub-prioress, which they did, in spite of her youth, she being then only twenty-six years old, that she might in that capacity be seen by many, for it was the sub-prioress' duty to accompany the prioress every time a stranger came to the grate.

Father Vincenso da Fivizzano, Father Tommaso da Siena, and Father Vincenso Ercolani, who was afterwards Bishop of Perugia, after a mature investigation, also retracted their suspicions, and regarded her as a saint. God did not fail moreover to confirm this opinion by prodigies, the first of which happened to Father Niccola Michelozzi, Provincial of the Roman Province, who still doubtful of Catherine's sanctity, tried a new experiment, which was the following one. He gave orders that he should be informed when she went into an ecstasy, and when Mother Eufrasia Mascalzoni came to inform him of it, he was inspired by God to go and tell her to go into the oratory where Catherine was, to kneel down before her, and observe what she did, and to return and tell him of it. The mother went to execute the command, and she had hardly knelt down before the saint blessed her three successive times, and kissed her forehead thrice, which was precisely the proof that the father had mentally asked God to give him of the truth of Catherine's spirit. When he heard sister Eufrasias's account, he thanked God for having con-

vinced him of it, for even angels cannot penetrate the unuttered thoughts of the mind.

But what happened to Sister Maria Gabriella Mascalzoni was, beyond comparison, more wonderful. Although she loved our saint much, and had heard her sanctity declared by so many eminent men, her mind did not seem at rest concerning the truth of her ecstasies, wherefore on one occasion, when she found her alone in the oratory in an ecstasy, and no one was by, she knelt down before her, and earnestly prayed that the Lord might quiet her doubts, when raising her eyes to the saint's face, she saw it changed into that of our Lord crucified, with hair and beard like His. She was frightened at this, and would have fled, but the saint, still in ecstasy, stopped her, and placing her face near her breast said to her, "Which do you think I am, sister Catherine or Jesus?" Still more frightened at this speech, she broke into a flood of tears, and answered in a loud voice, which was heard by many persons, "You are Jesus;" and when the same question was repeated three times, she gave the same answer, and not only was her fear changed into joy, but also her doubts into a certainty, that Catherine's ecstasies were the work of God, and not of the devil, as she herself asserted afterwards to the other nuns; moreover, when sister Catherine was asked by her guardian, to whom she was obliged to answer the truth, how such a change of countenance could happen, she replied according to

the teaching of St. Paul, "Do you not know that God abideth in whoever abideth in Him?"

This was not the case with Father Ginnesio da Lucca, the Provincial of the Roman Province, in the year 1567, who not believing the truth of the saint's ecstasies, resolved to put her in prison unless she publicly confessed that she had been deceived and deluded. As she could not with truth say this, she always kept to the same answers that she had given to the other provincials; but they did not satisfy this father, who was already determined to imprison her, but while he was considering how to fulfil this design he was called to Rome in great haste, which prevented him from putting it in execution. He told the saint as he went away, that she must make up her mind either to be imprisoned or to confess that her ecstasies were false, a threat which afflicted the sisters very much, for they had had evidence of her goodness, with the exception of Catherine herself, who was not only undisturbed but rejoiced at being despised. But God, who ever increased His favour for her, caused her to prophecy with holy simplicity the death of the provincial; for while the sisters expressed to her the grief which they felt, she answered: "Do not fear, the Lord will provide for us, *e finirà nella paglia*," a speech which they then interpreted to mean, that all these threats would end in chaff, according to the proverb;* but it was not so, for on his return to Prato he had

* i. e. "Finire nella paglia," which means to end in chaff, to end in nothing.

to pass the torrent of the Paglia, below the mountain on which the castle of Radicofani stands, which was much flooded ; he fell into the water, was taken out half dead, and died shortly after ; and thus the sisters discovered that the above-mentioned speech was prophetic, and the sanctity of Catherine remained still more certain.

Father Francesco Graziani, who was vicar of the province in the year 1570, was more fortunate. He went to Prato with the intention of making fresh trials of her virtue, and happened to arrive at the monastery when it was her duty as prioress, to open the door to him, and as she did this, he saw her face all shining and surrounded by a bright cloud, which remained for a good while, until as his eyes could no longer endure such brightness, he threw himself at her feet to ask her pardon, and the glory disappeared, and Catherine went to call the nuns to come and welcome the Father Provincial, who was quite confused, and withdrew to one side with the Mothers, to whom he related with much tenderness, and almost with tears, his doubts respecting her sanctity, and exhorted them to reverence her, and to show their gratitude for the great privilege of being governed by a saint, by imitating her holy life.

These successive prodigies revealed Catherine's sanctity more and more, till the fame of it reached the Sovereign Pontiff, Paul III., who, although he was aware with how much caution and prudence the superiors of the order had conducted themselves towards her, gave Cardinal Roberto Pucci,

a commission to visit the monastery under some pretext, being Bishop of Pistoja, and to verify with great care the reports which had been circulated about Catherine. The Cardinal executed the supreme commands, and went there accompanied by some other bishops and prelates, and after a minute examination of the fathers' conduct and of Catherine's goodness, they sent an answer to the Pope, in which they greatly commended the fathers' circumspection and caution in keeping secret as far as they could the gifts that God showered upon Catherine, and in only allowing with great repugnance a very few persons to enter the monastery; and spoke great things of her holiness, which might be brought forward to confound the heretics which then infested Christendom, by showing them what wonders God works in true Catholics who are in the obedience of the Church of Rome. Thus her sanctity became more conspicuous and certain, not only at Prato, but also in Tuscany and in Rome.

CHAPTER X.

ESPOUSALS, STIGMATA, AND OTHER FAVOURS WHICH ST. CATHERINE RECEIVED FROM JESUS.

THE great and unbounded munificence of God was not satisfied with rewarding Catherine's great love towards Him with the above-mentioned ecstasies and raptures, but He wished to manifest to the world how much He loved her in return; "Ego

diligentes me diligo—I love them that love Me."* And having decreed to declare her His spouse, He first purified her heart, in order that still more inflamed by His love, it might be entirely His. On the 6th of June, 1541, she earnestly entreated our Lord to change her heart, which her vows had consecrated to Him, that she might say with truth, that as she no longer had a will of her own, so she had no heart of her own, a grace which she had so many times requested, and first obtained on this day, when, after holy communion, she was happily taken in spirit into heaven, to behold the celestial joys and the felicity of the blessed, and was presented by the most holy Mary at the throne of her Divine Son, with the entreaty that he would change her heart, from an earthly to a heavenly one.

This was granted, and she was purified from the least attachment to created things, and solely enamoured of God, so that, as she confessed with her own lips to her guardian, Sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, she could give her mind without the smallest difficulty to heavenly contemplation.

This change of her heart prepared her for being very soon declared by Jesus to be His spouse, and receiving the ring which He had promised her before she took the habit,† on her reception, as we have related.‡ This took place on Easter Day, April 9th, 1642, at the dawn of which she beheld the Redeemer of the world, accompanied by His most holy Mother, by the angelic doctor

* Proverbs, viii. 17. † Chapter iv. ‡ Chapter v.

St. Thomas, St. Mary Magdalen, and a multitude of angels, in her cell; she was frightened at first, but as soon as she had made the sign of the cross, and spit upon them according to her confessor's directions, her heart was filled with joy at being thus favoured by Heaven, and the more when the Blessed Virgin assured her that it was not an illusion but a true vision; and she began to return most humble thanks for such favours; then the Virgin turning to her Divine Son, prayed Him to espouse Catherine, which He immediately did, and took a rich and precious gold ring, enamelled with red, with a most brilliant diamond in the centre, off His left hand, and placed it on the first finger of her left hand, which the Blessed Virgin held up for the purpose.

This precious ring was not visible to all, though many saw it under the same appearance which it had when Jesus gave it to her; to others it looked like a circlet of raised flesh on that finger, with a small lump in the middle; others saw a great splendour which surrounded the fingers.

The nuns were not the only persons who were thought worthy to see it in its true form; it was also seen by Filippo Salviati, who attests the following fact in a letter to Sister Maria Jacopa Cini, which is kept in St. Vincent's monastery. He doubted whether Sister Catherine had been really espoused by Jesus, and when he was in his villa of Majano asleep, she appeared to him, saying that she was come to show him the ring which her Spouse Jesus had given her, and he saw a gold circlet

enamelled with red, containing a most precious diamond, and after he had examined it, Catherine said, "Lest you should doubt to-morrow morning of the truth of this, and think that what you now see has been a dream, I will prick your lip with the point of the diamond," which puncture gave him so much pain for many months, that although he felt the greatest delight at the warning, he frequently said that it would have been better for him not to have been so distrustful and curious.

And her guardian, Sister Maria Maddalena Strozzi, seeing only a red circle which resembled a ring with a square stone in the middle, and doubting whether it had been made by artifice, with her confessor's consent, tried whether she could produce a similar one on her finger with varnish or vermilion, but she never could make one that had the slightest resemblance in colour or in shape to Catherine's; and she further attempted while she was in ecstasy to efface it with water or by friction, which failed, and she repeated her experiments, when Catherine, who let her do just as she wished, was in her senses, but she never could succeed even in deadening the red colour. Catherine grieved to see herself the cause of so many doubts in her sisters' minds, but she consoled herself by submitting to the will of God, and used to say to her guardian, "You tell me that you see a red circle on my finger, and I am obliged to believe what you say, yet I see a real diamond set in gold."

It was seen by several sisters, after her death, when she was on the bier, under various aspects

but, during her lifetime she hid it as far as was possible, always keeping that hand under her scapular, except when in ecstasy, and then being deprived of her senses, and unable to conceal it, every one was at liberty to see it; they also saw it on the three days after Easter, the same year when she received an obedience to pray, that Jesus would make it visible to all the sisters. It is not surprising that every body could not see it as it was, because, being a gift from heaven, it was only visible to those whom God thought worthy to see it, as was the case with the ring with which our Lord espoused St. Catherine of Sienna, which, as St. Antoninus relates, was only seen by herself; and also with those received by St. Catherine, virgin and martyr, St. Theresa, St. Rose of Lima, and lastly, St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi.

The Saviour of the world who had espoused Catherine, made her like Him, in the wounds He received, and though she had felt and represented His passion, every week, with various gestures, in her rapture which lasted twenty-eight hours; a few days after the espousals, He impressed the exterior marks of His passion on her hands, feet, and side. This happened on Friday, within the Octave of Easter, namely, April 14, 1542, when in her long ecstasy, she arrived at the contemplation of the crucifixion of Jesus, and her compassion for her Crucified Love was so intense, that she prayed Him to let her share His sorrows, and He satisfied her, by inflicting His wounds on her hands and side, with this difference, however, that His right

side, and her left side, was pierced by the lance. She told her guardian that, so violent was the pain of this wound, that she seemed to fall dead on the ground, although Jesus had assured her that she should not die of it.

She suffered as much from the wounds in her hands and feet, so that the nuns could easily perceive what pain she felt in walking, and she continually thanked her Divine Spouse for having given her these wounds, which increased and strengthened the compassion she felt in meditating His bitter passion.

These wounds, from which she suffered cruel pains until her death, always appeared to her eyes to be open, and pierced, from side to side, and sometimes dropping blood; for example, on Christmas night, 1542, when the most holy Virgin Mary returned to the saint's cell, about five hours after the Ave Maria, accompanied by St. Mary Magdalen, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Thecla, and many angels, bringing her the Child Jesus, as she had promised her the preceding year, and also three crowns, one of gold, another of silver, and a third of thorns, which latter she promised to give her, and did so on another occasion, which we will describe further on. After exhorting her to exercise the virtues of patience and charity in a special manner, in the following year, in order to meet every adversity with a courageous heart, and to love God alone, and nothing else, she gave her the Child. But the saint, with much humility and devotion, entreated her to accommodate Him in her arms, so that He should not be stained by the blood

which fell from her wounds. Our Lady grante her request, and after a short time required her to give back the Child, which Catherine did, with this one request, that she would deign to carry Him to her guardian, and this also was granted, but she being asleep, only enjoyed His presence in a dream, as she informed St. Catherine after she was awake.

The same precaution was not necessary on the other occasions, when the most holy Virgin granted her the favour of placing the Child Jesus in her arms, as her wound was not always bleeding, which will not surprise those who remember that, as St. Bonaventure relates, the wounds of St. Francis of Assisi were seen to drop blood only a few times.

These wounds, impressed by Jesus on the body of the saint, and which she herself felt, and saw, during the remainder of her life, were seen by others only when it pleased God, and only by those whom He willed and made worthy to see them, nor did they appear the same to every one, as the lives of St. Catherine of Sienna, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi relate of the stigmata of those saints.

Some persons deposed, that they saw them pierced from side to side; others, that they saw them dropping blood, so that they feared she would stain whatever she touched, with blood; others, and among them her guardian, Sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, asserted that they had seen them so resplendent, that they could not fix their eyes upon them; the greater number, how-

ever, deposed that they had seen those in her hands swollen red, but with the skin entire, and not pierced, only in the middle there was a livid circle, of the size of a small piece of money, in which blood seemed to float.

This was their appearance when the sisters saw them from the eighteenth hour, on the vigil of the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, until sunset on the following day, when she was in one of her accustomed ecstasies; and again, on the 4th of April, of the same year, when they were seen by Father Angiolo Diacieti, then Provincial of the Roman Province, and Father Modesto Masi the Prior of the convent.

In like manner, her confessor, and uncle, saw them on another occasion, when the servant of God was in ecstasy, and held one hand outside her scapular, and the nuns perceiving this, ran up confusedly to see and kiss it, but the Father Confessor, who was present, reproved them for crowding up, with some severity, which was punished, to his great confusion, by her withdrawing her hand, when he also wished to kiss it, and he perceived that she did so because he had not profited by a charitable admonition which she had made him, to be more gentle in reproving, for as soon as he had perceived his error, and asked pardon of God, she removed her hand from under her scapular, that he might kiss it. These were not the only occasions when the sisters and other superiors of the order, and of the convent, had the happiness of seeing them, and it was also granted to her step-mother,

Fiammetta Diaceti, and a few other persons living in the world.

Those of her feet were not so often seen, nor by so many of the sisters; and on one occasion, by twelve or fifteen of the senior mothers, when she was surprised by an ecstasy, as she rose from her bed, and her feet remained uncovered, nor did the superioress judge it prudent to inform the others, lest her modesty should be pained by hearing of it, and they attested that they saw them pierced through, as if they had just been unfastened from the cross, with the flesh more swollen on one side than on the other, and filled with circulating blood; that the sight of them inspired terror and amazement, and that a most fragrant odour issued from them.

The wound in her left side was only seen at one period of her life, by her guardian, who had to anoint her stomach for some illness, from which she suffered, nor did she see it more than ten or twelve times, although she had to anoint her breast very often. She was much mortified when she found that she was deprived of such a grace, and complained of it to Jesus, resigning herself, nevertheless, to His Divine Will. She said that this wound was larger than the others.

Likewise, after her death, many of the sisters and secular persons saw those in the hands, and smelt a most sweet odour when they kissed them. Also those of the feet and side were seen by those who clothed her body, though not by all, and perhaps God punished the excessive curiosity

that some felt to see them, by concealing them from their eyes.

Some time after, the most holy Virgin fulfilled the promise that she had made of giving Catherine her Divine Son's crown of thorns, (which favour was also granted to St. Catherine of Sienna,) and the intense pain which was caused by the punctures of the thorns in her skull and forehead, threw her into an agony of pain and love. The crown, and the small holes which it made in her head, emitting fresh blood, were perceptible to many persons, especially to the lay sisters, who cut her hair during her life, and to the sisters who arranged her veil after her death. The grace of seeing them was not granted to all, nor could those of St. Catherine of Sienna, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, be seen by every one; but those to whom this favour was accorded made a faithful report of all their peculiarities, stating, in the process of her canonization, that the punctures encircled the whole of her head.

And in order that none of the most painful wounds that her spouse endured should be wanting in Catherine, she had a large aperture, about the width of three fingers, from her right shoulder down to her waist, caused by the great weight of the cross, which she carried after her Divine Spouse, to Calvary. Some of the nuns who had the care of her when she was ill, received the grace of seeing this mark.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE VISIONS IN WHICH CATHERINE SAW JESUS, THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN, AND OTHER SAINTS OF THE CHURCH MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT.

As our Lord Jesus Christ had promised S. Catherine from her childhood to declare her His Spouse, He poured out upon her, from her earliest years, many treasures of grace, of consolation, and of comfort, ever augmenting her love for His most holy Passion, and favouring her more and more frequently with His conversation. He animated her to suffer His Passion with Him, and to pacify His anger, in the way we have related above, and gave her various holy instruction on the manner of life which was most pleasing in His eyes, and this He did not only once, but very many times ; for instance, on the 8th of June, 1542, when she was kneeling in her cell with the crucifix, which she kept there to satisfy her burning love, in her arms, praying with great fervour that He would teach her how to live quietly without offending Him ; and it, to correspond to hers, with equal affection, opened its eyes and stretched out its pierced hands towards her neck to embrace her with great love and familiarity, calling her His Spouse, and assuring her that her works were pleasing to Him ; finally, He gave her a great deal of advice for her-

self and her sisters; and she, overflowing with grateful tears, knew not how to cease returning thanks for this favour.

Similarly, when she was lying in bed overcome by some infirmity, and fixed her eyes on that most holy image of Jesus crucified, manifesting the bitterness of her sufferings to Him, and offering them as a satisfaction for her sins, she felt that our Lord answered that she should console herself by reflecting on the great torments which He first suffered for her, and for the whole world, with such unwearied patience; then on the infinite difference that there was between Him and her; and thus she felt comforted.

This crucifix, which so many times condescended to speak to her, and to bestow on her such singular favours, was placed with her consent in the oratory of the monastery; that the other nuns might be able to adore it, and to pray before it in their necessities; at present, it is with all the relics presented by various personages, and inspected and registered by Monsignor Caccia, Bishop of Pistoja, when he made the process of her canonization, in her own cell, which, with the addition of the contiguous one, was converted into an oratory.

She was equally favoured by the Blessed Virgin, who gave the Infant Jesus into her arms on several occasions, only two of which we have mentioned, for fear of prolixity; but we must add that this happened ordinarily on Christmas night, and on the feast of the Purification. Catherine would never have left off caressing the Divine

Child, and giving vent to her immense love for Him in devout ejaculations and tender words, unless the Virgin had asked her to give Him back to her.

Sometimes on the Assumption, the Blessed Virgin showed her how she was accompanied by angels into glory, and at others the depth of her humility on the day of her birth, and on the day of the happy announcement of the Incarnation of the Word in her most pure womb. She was always accompanied by some of the saints, and made her various exhortations to humility, obedience, and patience, and the other virtues, which were also directed to the sisters, as she told her confessor, saying, that when she was awake she very frequently saw some of the saints, even the glorious Virgin and our Lord Himself, who remained with her, instructing her in the spiritual life.

The Blessed Virgin admonished her to tell the nuns that after they had finished their night office in the dormitory, according to the custom of the Dominican Order, they should not retire with so much haste, but should conclude the Ave Maria, and implore her Son's blessing and her own in these words: "Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria." She also taught her a new mode of praying and commemorating the Passion of her Divine Son, showing her how pleasing the recollection of it was to Him. It was a canticle composed of sentences of Holy Scripture, which was to be sung in the monastery every Thursday evening, to remind the nuns how much the Son

of God had suffered for man on that night and the following day.

This canticle was transcribed from the dictation of the servant of God, by Father Timoteo de' Ricci, and sent to Father Francesco Romeo, general of the order, who not only approved of it, but sent circular letters to all his provinces, ordering that it should be sung in all the convents on Friday evening. It begins, "Amici mei, et proximi mei," and has been inserted for the satisfaction of devout persons at the end of this Life.

In these visions St. Catherine prayed with great devotion to the Infant Jesus, that He would extend His protection to herself, to our holy mother the church, and to her sisters; she always prayed for the conversion of sinners, and begged the most holy Virgin, and the saints who accompanied her, to intercede for her with God for the accomplishment of her desires.

Thus it will not create surprise when we state that in her afflictions she was frequently consoled by angels, and particularly by her angel guardian, whom she had seen from her childhood, as has been described. She sometimes received warnings from him, for instance, on the vigil of St. Bartholomew, 1542, when he stopped her as she ascended a staircase, and said that she was to go immediately to console sister Ludovica Niccolini, who was so tormented by a long and grievous malady, that she was almost on the point of despair, and the saint urged by her love for her neighbour's souls, and for the sick nun, went to her immediately, and by her fervent exhortations

induced her to return to herself, and ask God's pardon for the crime that she had begun to think of committing. Catherine exhorted her to receive the Holy Eucharist to gain strength to bear that painful infirmity, and though the invalid remonstrated that she should not be able to prepare herself as fully as she wished for the reception of so great a sacrament, Catherine trusting in God's immense mercies, encouraged her to receive it, and promised to assist her. On the strength of this promise sister Ludovica consented, and communicated the following day with great devotion. Catherine was present, and when the Blessed Sacrament was brought in went into an ecstasy, weeping continually. It lasted a long time, which the nuns thought she employed in praying for the sick sister; and the relief which she felt after receiving Holy Communion, was a proof that God had heard the prayers of His servant.

Her spirit enjoyed the sight of her angel-guardian on many occasions; sometimes he, and sometimes other angels, were her guides when she was lifted up to heaven, and they explained many divine mysteries to her, and this filled her with such joy, that it is no wonder she henceforward loathed all earthly consolations.

Nor was she less favoured by the saints reigning in heaven, especially by those of her own order, for instance, by the Patriarch St. Dominic, St. Thomas, and St. Vincent Ferrer, and others, who were usually present when she received graces from heaven, and continually gave her advice for herself and her sisters.

The witnesses agree that the saint who encouraged and assisted her most was St. Thecla, virgin and martyr, whom she chose for her particular patron, who used to speak familiarly with her, instructing her very often in heavenly things, and often lending her assistance in temporal matters, such as in sewing, in embroidering, and the work that was given her to do. She was not visible to others, although the saint saw her, but it was discovered by the long undertakings which she finished in a few hours; for example, when Sister Clemenza Quartucci, who managed the nuns' clothes, gave her a hundred pieces of linen to make up, she returned them to her finished the next morning, having sewed more in one night than the quickest worker could have done in five days, and yet she had not neglected any of her usual prayers. Sister Clemenza and the nuns to whom she showed them, knowing that she had not had any assistance, presuaded the superioress to command her to tell them how she had contrived to do them so fast, and thus compelled by obedience, she told them with great reluctance that St. Thecla had assisted her, and she made the same reply on a similar occasion, when she finished some curtains in a few hours; and lastly, when she was embroidering a corporal with red silk, the nuns remarked that the other side of the corporal was embroidered by an invisible hand, so that as she made one stitch on one side another appeared on the other, and this veil is kept in the monastery for the veneration of the faithful.

Catherine conversed with the saints who were pilgrims on the earth, as well as those in heaven, as is proved by her intercourse with St. Philip Neri. Besides her correspondence by letters, which are still preserved at Santa Maria, in Vallicella, commonly called the Chiesa Nuova, they saw and spoke with each other, although Sister Catherine lived at Prato, and St. Philip at Rome, as appears from the processes on St. Philip Neri's canonization, and Gregory the Fifteenth's Bull respecting it, in which these words occur, "Also while he remained in Rome, he conversed for a long time with Catherine of Ricci, a nun under the rule of St. Augustine, living at Prato, in Tuscany." This does not state that our saint appeared in Rome to St. Philip Neri, but it appears in the depositions of the witnesses examined about his canonization, that she appeared to St. Philip during the lifetime of both; and her constant correspondence with him who is universally allowed to have had the gift of the discernment of spirits, furnishes an additional proof of St. Catherine's great sanctity.

The declaration of the Rota assures us that the same thing occurred to St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, for we read there, that "distant things were present to her, and sometimes she saw a nun in Prato named Catherine of Ricci, a virgin as glorious as she was conspicuous for the brightness of her holiness, writing answers to her letters, and giving them to a courier, and when the nuns had examined the date of the letters, they found that they had been written at the very time that

this had been supernaturally seen by St. Mary Magdalen." The history of her life gives the following account of the matter. "In the year 1586, the Blessed Mary Magdalen was one day in a rapture in the hall of the noviciate, and dictated a letter to Sister Catherine of Ricci, a nun of great virtue and goodness in the monastery of St. Vincent at Prato; it was sealed and signed by a nun who was present at that ecstasy, and sent by the steward to Prato, which is ten miles distant from Florence. A few hours after, the saint still in ecstasy, showed that she was looking at the steward giving her letter to Sister Catherine, and soon after with her eyes fixed, appeared to read the answer, which disturbed her countenance a little, because it was not what she desired, and again she saw Sister Catherine committing her letter to the care of the messenger. He returned after four hours, and they learned from him that he had given the letter to Sister Catherine, and received her answer at the exact times that this had been observed by the saint."

But what deserves our particular notice is that St. Mary Magdalen stated to her confessor, and he to Father Guidi, who wrote a Life of our St. Catherine, that she had seen her soul in the triumphant company of the blessed in heaven.

Finally St. Pius V. ordered his nephew, the Cardinal of Alexandria, whom he sent as Legate to Spain to negotiate the famous league against the Turks, to stop at Prato on his way there, in order to see our saint, and recommend the success of his mission to her prayers; and when

he reported the conclusion of the league, he received a command to return to Prato to thank St. Catherine, which he did with remarkable satisfaction.

CHAPTER XII.

ON CATHERINE'S GREAT CHARITY TOWARDS HER NEIGHBOUR.

As we are taught by the Apostle St. John, the love of God in us cannot be said to be perfect, and to have attained the divine object of its desires, until it leads us to direct all our efforts to the good of our neighbour; Si diligamus invicem, Deus in nobis manet, et charitas ejus in nobis perfecta est. If we love one another God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us;* and, therefore, Catherine's heart, which was so inflamed with love towards her Spouse, desired and sought no other employment than to exert herself for the spiritual or temporal good of her neighbour. The poor had only to show themselves to her in order to obtain relief; as soon as any one asked for alms she ran to her superiors to seek something for them; and sometimes she begged secular persons to help them; with her superior's blessing, she willingly deprived herself of her own food to distribute it among them; and when she was prioress

* Ep. 1. of St. John, c. 4, v. 12.

she forbade the portress ever to send away a poor person without an alms. When her great charity towards the poor became generally known, she received sums of money for them from different parts besides those she collected herself, so that she was able to give portions to a great number of girls, to enable them to marry or to become nuns, in case God inspired them to do so, usually exhorting them to enter a convent. As the fame of her charity was more spread, the number of persons in Florence and Tuscany who sent her large sums of money to distribute at her pleasure increased; among the noble Florentines may be mentioned Federigo dé Ricci, Alberto Bardi, Antonio Gondi, and especially Tommaso Ginori, who left a farm of great value to the monastery, with the express condition, that during Sister Catherine's life, the produce of it was to be disposed of at her will for the benefit of the poor; she managed it with great exactness, and rewarded the generosity of her benefactors by the assiduous prayers of herself and the nuns for their welfare and that of their families.

She was also very charitable to the fathers of S. Dominic, at Prato, and assisted them, both separately and in common, whenever they wanted anything; and in the same way she always relieved her own nuns, particularly when, as prioress, she had the care of them; she could never bear to see them suffer in any way, always providing them with all that was necessary; and as she knew the poverty of the monastery, she prayed her Divine Spouse to provide for it, and her prayers were

heard, for the great fame of her sanctity induced many persons to leave contributions to it, as we shall relate hereafter.

She was not satisfied with succouring them in their necessities, but waited upon and consoled them in their illnesses, watching them with great zeal by day and particularly by night; she was always ready to comfort them in their sorrows, and to pray for them, which she did every night, however tedious the sickness might be; and her charity also extended to the nuns who were obliged to attend upon the patients; she used to send them to rest themselves, while she did the lowest work of the infirmary, even that which properly belonged to the lay-sisters; and she never shrunk from any illness, however infectious or disgusting; once she applied the remedies to a lay-sister who had a complaint as repulsive as it was contagious in her head, with her own hands, continually exhorting her to be patient, for God would reward her for her sufferings, and after five days she was perfectly well again.

She redoubled her visits when she saw that the disease grew worse, so that when the sick nuns perceived this, they inferred, and always rightly, that they were likely to die; and when that time drew near, she recommended them to God with such fervent prayers, that she was always rapt in ecstasy during their agony, and did not return to her senses till the sick nun had passed from this life. It was a common opinion in the monastery, based upon the statement of her guardian, who had been told so by Catherine herself, that

she accompanied their souls to paradise, or to purgatory, and obtained a prosperous passage for them by her prayers; so that the nuns never ventured to touch her until they knew by the slight cough which she always had at the end of her ecstasies, that she had returned to her senses. She then closed the eyes of the corpse, and assisted the others to dress it, and to take it into the church.

Catherine's charity to sinners was not less conspicuous, and very often when she saw them, her eloquence and the power of her words produced feelings of zeal and contrition in their hearts, and, with tears and sighs, they gave themselves up to her guidance, inquiring what they should do to obtain a free pardon from God for their grievous faults. Among others, Francesco Mazzinghi, Filippo Rospigliosi, and Biagio Menocchi, who, having given themselves up to evil in their youth, could not find the means of escaping from it, on approaching her were filled with horror of the sins they had committed, and immediately began to seek the path of true virtue, persevering in it with the assistance of her continual prayers, which her Divine Spouse exhorted her to make in the same way that He had exhorted her to cause the three processions to be performed in the monastery.

Her ardent charity for the souls of sinners was not satisfied with exhortations and with perpetual prayers for their conversion, but caused her to receive, and even to pray for the sufferings which were due to them in punishment for their sins.

One of the most liberal benefactors of the monastery lived without a thought of God, and she first gave him many fraternal admonitions; but he was so obstinate and hardened in vice, that he laughed at her instead of amending his life; and once, in the hearing of another nun, he told her, very angrily, to be quiet and go to spin, for if he chose to go to hell it would be his misfortune, and not hers. The obstinacy that the answer of this miserable man betrayed caused the most acute sorrow to Catherine's charitable heart, and she began to pray for his conversion with greater earnestness and renewed tears, until, to the detriment of her own health, her Divine Spouse heard her petition, and inflicted on her the punishment which that hardened sinner deserved: she suffered many severe corporeal pains; and after his death assured the nun who had heard the perverse answer that he made her, that his soul had been preserved from the infernal chastisements, adding, "N. N. will see now whether I know how to spin."

She acted in a similar manner on the 12th of September, 1542, when a notorious thief was sentenced to death in Prato. He flattered himself that he should be able to commute his condemnation into a sentence to the galleys, which he had often tried before, but the failure of this hope threw him into such despair that he would listen to no one who spoke to him of conversion, whereupon those who comforted him sent to Catherine to request her prayers. She immediately rose from her bed, though she was lying ill, and

went into an ecstasy in the act of praying for him, during which she was led into the presence of her Divine Spouse, and implored Him to take compassion on that soul with all the fervour she was capable of, but He at first refused, on account of the great obstinacy which had led him to reject all His holy inspirations, and which had rendered him unworthy of pardon. Catherine, not discouraged by this pursued her entreaties that He would not abandon that soul for which He had suffered so much, and offered to undergo any punishment that He was pleased to inflict on her, if He would only show mercy to that soul. This heroic act of charity moved the pity of the Divine Redeemer, and when she obtained the favour she returned to her senses, and sent word to his comforters* that the thief was converted, and so entirely was his heart changed, that he not only confessed his sins with many tears, and received absolution, but made a public acknowledgment of them on the scaffold, and exhorted the people to fly from and to hate them, unless they wished to expose themselves to that ignominious death which he so fully deserved, and still more to the obvious danger, which he had narrowly escaped, of losing their souls for ever. Catherine suffered a most violent pain in her head for the three following years; but the knowledge of the conversion of the thief, and the salvation of his soul was sufficient to make her bear that expiatory pain with real joy, as she told sister Maria Maddalena Strozzi, her guardian.

Besides this pain, she suffered cruel pains in

* The name given to those who accompany criminals to the scaffold.

her side, to free the soul of a religious from despair, to which a long and heavy malady, that tormented her until she died, had caused her to give herself up. Catherine blessed her with the ring with which God had espoused her, and she died contrite, having obtained eternal salvation. When her exceeding charity was known in Prato and in Tuscany, every one was in haste to recommend the souls of their deceased friends to her prayers; and when she knew by revelation that they were in Purgatory, she offered all her penances and prayers for them, that they might soon be free to enjoy eternal glory. She was often heard in her ecstasies to implore her Divine Spouse, who granted all her requests, in their behalf, and many of them appeared to her to thank her for her charity; moreover, once on the feast of her purification, the Blessed Virgin showed her in an ecstasy, all the souls which through her prayers had ascended to the joys of heaven.

When her prayers and penances were not sufficient to liberate these souls from purgatory, she used to offer herself with readiness to suffer their penalties, that they might go at once to enjoy the Beatific Vision; and these penalties are most awful when they are inflicted by an Omnipotent hand to purify souls from the guilt that they would not atone for by earthly penances.

One of the souls in purgatory for which she suffered a great deal, was that of a great prince and ruler, for whom she had offered during his lifetime a great many prayers, fasts, and pen-

ances, lest he should be condemned to hell; they had evidently been accepted, for before his death he gave great signs of a change of life, and a firm resolution to spend the remainder of it in the holy fear of God, and he passed in this excellent frame of mind from this world to purgatory, and as soon as this fact was revealed to Catherine in answer to the prayers she made to that effect, she offered to suffer in her own person all the punishments that the Divine Justice was about to inflict on him. Her petition was granted, and the prince's soul raised to enjoy God's glory, but at the same time Catherine's torments began; they lasted forty days, and were so extraordinary, that the doctors perceiving them to be beyond the range of their art, concluded that they were sent by God, to enable her to atone for some soul in purgatory. The account given by those who witnessed them, was that her body appeared as if it were covered by a number of blisters full of serum, which boiled as though it was over a fire. They also emitted such excessive heat, that the cell seemed on fire, and no one could remain in it many moments without going out to take breath. It was easy to see that her flesh was burning, her tongue was like a red hot iron, and after the effervescence subsided, it had the appearance of having being roasted; but after a short interval the blisters rose again, bringing the same heat with them, yet they could not impair the joyousness of her face, or the serenity of her mind, which rejoiced in the midst of these fiery torments. Although the doctors were aware that

her illness was out of the common course of things, they ordered her to take some baths and cooling remedies, more from a wish to show that they had prescribed something, than with the hope that they would do her any good. The Saint took them from motives of obedience, though she knew that they could not give her any relief, for, as she confided for their consolation to two nuns who lamented the death of the above-named prince, she could not recover till she had atoned to the Divine Justice for his sins. Although her humility prevented her from disclosing her sentiments, she rejoiced at having those remedies, because they only increased her torments; sometimes to such a degree that she lost the power of speech for ten or twelve minutes. The nuns seeing her in this dreadful state, said that she seemed to be in a furnace of fire, and she simply answered that it was so, and she said to those who were in her confidence, when they begged her not to take such atrocious sufferings upon herself, "Forgive me, mothers, for replying to your reproofs; my beloved Spouse prizes our souls so much, that He has exhorted and charged me to pray for sinners, that they may repent of their faults; and I not only accept with readiness every torment for their eternal salvation, but I long to suffer all imaginable pains that they may be able quickly to see and praise their Redeemer." She recovered her former health at the end of forty days, and answered with freedom the questions made by various members of the prince's family, respecting the state of his soul, saying, "Have no fear, for

he is in the enjoyment of eternal glory ;" whence it was evident that what she had suffered was to atone for his faults.

Many were the pains that she endured for other souls, but we shall not run the risk of prolixity by describing them here, for the above examples afford abundant proof of her vehement charity towards her neighbour, which attained such an heroic degree, that the mere sight of her was enough to convert many persons who led bad lives. Among these, a mason who was in inveterate habits of sin, happened to see her carrying the crucifix in the three processions, and was filled with such contrition and detestation for his sins that he immediately sought a priest and confessed them all, with a firm resolution to amend his life. The same thing happened to a bishop who found her in a rapture, and to people of every rank and condition, who by seeing her were changed from sinners into penitents.

CHAPTER XIII.

ST. CATHERINE'S EXACT OBSERVANCE OF HER VOWS, RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS.

The great charity towards God and towards her neighbour, which, as we have said, always burnt in Catherine's heart, not only rendered her unshaken in the exact fulfilment of the Divine precepts as our Saviour said, "On these two command-

ments dependeth the whole law," but also guided her in the perfect observance of the three vows which she made at her profession. It was enough for her to hear or to be able to know the wishes of her superiors, to make her do what they wished; and her life was so spotless, that she seemed in the eyes of all those who had intercourse with her, rather an angel on earth, than a mortal creature. It was this that compelled her, though with great repugnance caused by her humility, to publish all the favours which Heaven had imparted to her, relating them not merely to her confessor and to the guardian assigned her by God, and confirmed by her superiors, but to all the other superiors who came to make different trials of the holiness of her soul. Thus we are all indebted to her great obedience, which was the means by which all the favours showered upon her by Heaven, have come to universal notice.

Her Divine Spouse frequently exhorted her to build and to found all her other virtues upon this perfect obedience and profound humility; her holy protectors also did so, when they encouraged her to spit upon the apparition of her Divine Spouse, an act of apparent contempt, but in reality most pleasing to them, because it was the result of obedience to her confessor.

It was this obedience that made her govern the monastery for the space of forty-four years, either as prioress or sub-prioress. She accepted these dignities with so much reluctance, that she used to say that if she could have escaped them by being placed in a small prison, loaded with fetters

and chains during all the time that she had to hold those offices, she would have gone there willingly. And she did not neglect to use all possible means to obtain the general's leave to refuse them, but always in vain, as we shall mention by and by.

Obedience alone had power to withdraw her from her raptures. Once when the other nuns sought all over the monastery for her for some necessary business, they could not find her, and knocked at the door of her cell, but as she was in ecstasy within she did not answer, until, since the affair was one of great importance, the prioress came, and the sound of her voice was sufficient to bring Catherine back to her senses, and perform immediately what she told her.

If on one occasion, after receiving communion at the hands of the provincial, Father Francesco Romeo, she remained in ecstasy at the grate, without obeying his injunction to retire and leave room for the others; it was so ordained by her Divine Spouse, (for she was entirely alienated from her senses at the time,) that the great fragrance which then issued from her, and the humble and loving words which she used to the most Holy Sacrament, might dispel all doubt of the truth of her ecstasies from the provincial's mind, as he publicly attested afterwards.

The ecstasies which she had when she went to communion, and heard the spiritual reading at the community meals, on account of which, while a simple nun, she was dispensed from communicating and going into the refectory with the

others, were a great objection to her exercising in a proper manner the office of sub-prioress of the monastery, which Father Tommaso da Samminiato, prior of the convent of St. Dominic, conferred upon her, and he commanded her, and the rest of the nuns, to pray specially that God would make those ecstasies cease, adding that if He did so it was a sign that He blessed her election ; she obeyed, and entreated God to take away the joy that these ecstasies gave her, and He granted this favour to their prayers.

She was most obedient to the doctors as well as to the superiors, even when violent pains were the consequence of it, which was the case whenever they gave her any medicine for an infirmity that she had taken upon herself for the relief of sinners, or of souls in purgatory ; and not only this, but she obeyed her equals and inferiors with invariable alacrity, so that they got the habit of telling her what they wished her to do.

Her obedience was so pleasing to God, that He showed His approval of it by a miracle, and this happened when the monastery was reduced to want, because the wheat was all rotten. They called upon the saint, such was the opinion of her sanctity, and without informing her of the circumstance, ordered her to take off her shoes and walk upon the wheat with bare feet ; she obeyed without enquiring the reason, and as soon as she had done so the corn became good, and although there was originally but a small quantity, it so greatly multiplied, that it supported the monastery for a long time, and a quantity was

given away to the benefactors of the monastery, who having heard of the miracle, asked for some out of devotion.

She was such a lover of this virtue of obedience, that when she was superioress, to prove themselves very obedient was the surest means that her subjects could take to appease her zeal; in this way they took out of her hands any penance, however just, that she might have imposed; and she continually exhorted them with holy zeal during her ecstasies, to cling to obedience as a secure anchor, if they wished to reach the port of eternal glory.

She practised with equal zeal the poverty and total renunciation of all earthly goods, which she professed by vow, having given up everything when she left her father's house in her earliest years, with a mind always free from the least affection for them, as perfect poverty requires, only prizing and wishing for those treasures which heaven confers on the souls it loves. It was this that made her wish to live without even necessary furniture, as her poor and mean cell, and coarse bad clothes, plainly showed. She distributed everything that was given her by her friends to the poor, with the superior's leave, without keeping the smallest piece of money; and never would use or keep in her cell anything but what the community supplied her with, thus instructing all by example, as well as words, to observe an austere poverty, and to put everything they possessed into their superior's hands; and because the monastery was too poor to provide each with what

was necessary, she exerted herself a great deal to induce rich and pious persons to provide for it in such a way that it might then, and in future, be rich enough to enable all the nuns to live a perfect community life.

She observed her vow of chastity with the greatest jealousy, keeping herself free from every vain thought, so that she was pure in soul, which she ever kept united with God, employing her mind in meditating the Passion, and her will in making acts of love of Him ; pure in her virginal body, pure in words, which she never used except to speak of God or with God, and pure, in fine, in her works, as was evident to all, for they breathed nothing but holiness and purity ; and the Lord, who had chosen her for His spouse, was not content with preventing the smallest shade of fault from staining her pure body and her beautiful soul, but moreover never permitted the devil to tempt her to impurity, or to present one single impure imagination which might darken or disturb, in the smallest degree, the white lily of her purity. It was His will that she should give many external indications of this grace ; the first was when she was making an address to her nuns during an ecstasy, enumerating it among the favours which God had bestowed upon her, in the following terms : "Thou, O my God, hast given me purity, humility, and uprightness ; they are Thy gifts, for I know that I am not capable of having anything good in myself ; preserve and strengthen them in me, my God, since they are pleasing to Thee ; my Jesus, I am certain that in

my words and works I have endeavoured always to act uprightly; and Thou knowest, O my Spouse, that I may say with truth that I have never done anything that I thought would displease Thee."

Her purity displayed itself principally in the strong and sweet fragrance which frequently issued from her virgin body, and proved its celestial origin by being only perceptible on certain occasions, especially when she was in prayer or in ecstasy, and to certain persons, among whom were Father Angiolo Diacceto, and Father Vincenzo da Fivizzano, besides many of the nuns.

Although the Lord did not allow her to suffer any temptations against chastity, she fled from all occasions which might inspire the smallest impure thought, and was ever averse to allowing her body either delicacies or repose, keeping it in the midst of the thorns of rigid penitence. She always hid herself, if obedience and the obligations of her offices allowed it, when she was likely to see or be seen by men; for example, once when a strange father was to come with their confessor to a procession in the monastery, in order to see her, she heard of it, and begged sister Lucia Rilli da Poppi, the lay sister who was in charge of the doves, to shut her up in the dovecote, that she might be safely hidden; and God showed how pleasing this conduct was to Him, by raising her to her usual ecstasies, and causing the doves to encircle her head like a crown, in which position her guardian, sister Maria Maddalena Strozzi, the lay sister, and

some more nuns who came to behold this prodigy found her; and she seemed so beautiful and resplendent, that she was more like an angel than a mortal woman. When she awoke out of her ecstasy, she said, "Do you see these little doves, they have all come round me," and returned joyfully to her cell.

She was equally exact in her observance of the rule of St. Augustine and the constitutions of the Third Order, and never failed to assist in choir by night or by day, and in the refectory, unless she was hindered by her ecstasies, by obedience, or by illness. She preserved perpetual silence, only speaking when her office of superioress obliged her, for her mind was always raised to God, and her mouth employed in vocal prayers.

She was most rigid in abstaining from meat on the days when it was prohibited by the rule, and when she had received a command from God to abstain from meat, and things made with meat, she never touched them more. In fact, she was most precise in observing the smallest clauses of the rule, though they do not bind under sin, and her example gave great edification to all the other nuns, and led them to correct themselves, and be more faithful to it for the future. Her continued admonitions on this point, both in ecstasy and out of it, which she made in the names of Jesus and of Mary, and ended by saying, "Daughters, you must treasure up the things that Jesus and His most holy Mother have told you," contributed to produce this effect;

and further, whenever the nuns asked for any advice, she instructed them to observe the constitutions, and to be humble and obedient to their superiors.

She showed the greatest repugnance to go to the grate before she was superioress, frequently concealing herself to avoid it, as we have described; and after a life of the most perfect obedience to the Constitutions, and an ardent zeal for their observance, she rallied all her energy on her death-bed, to recommend the nuns to keep them with regularity.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE SAINT'S PROFOUND HUMILITY.

Although the deepest humility is conspicuous in all the actions of Catherine that we have hitherto related, because she ever united a total contempt for herself to her burning charity; it is necessary to dwell particularly on the former virtue, at the same time, taking care not to repeat what has been said before.

She entertained such a low opinion of herself, that she thought she was unworthy to wear the habit of her holy religion, and used to say from her heart, "I have given a great deal of trouble and annoyance to this monastery, and I believe that if the nuns had to admit me now they would refuse to do so." She was asked by a

person who was in her confidence, if she really thought so, and replied: "I believe it firmly, because I have brought nothing but vexation and annoyance to the nuns."

She attributed the trials and tribulations of the monastery, and of the whole world, to her sins, saying, that she was the greatest and most miserable sinner in existence, and this idea grew so strong, that she very often called herself the scandal of the universe, especially when she heard that her ecstasies caused a great deal of disturbance in the monastery. She was accustomed to utter these humble sentiments when she was in ecstasy, and to say to God, "Thou knowest, that both in the world and in religion, I have been always full of iniquity, yet I may say with certainty, that I have never done any thing that I thought would offend Thee, not by my own strength, but because Thou hast guided and preserved me from sin, whom Thou knowest to be more inclined to evil than any of Thy other creatures." Thus, the greater and more signal were the favours which Heaven conferred upon her, the more she feared that they would be despised, being found in a person so vile, and full of imperfections, in fact, a vessel of sin and foulness, as she said herself. Her great humility led her to fly from everything that might be a motive of vain glory, one of the most powerful of which is, without doubt, personal credit, and her letter to St. Philip Neri shows how much she dreaded it; the autograph of this letter is preserved by the Fathers of the Oratory at Chiesa Nuova.

"JESUS, MARY.

"It mortifies me to think, that you, who are continually occupied in doing great things, for the glory of God, should have written to me, a vile woman, and a miserable sinner. May God reward your great charity. I asked God to give me health wherewith to serve Him this Lent, and He heard me, and all my ailments disappeared at once, but I do not appear to have deserved it, for I have done nothing since. However, I have applied all my actions for you, and have prayed His Divine Majesty to cure you, and to preserve your health, because you are so much needed by the Church. Have the goodness to pray to Jesus for me, that I may not throw away by my own fault, the graces which he gives me every hour. Live happy as to your end, for God, who is most just, cannot deny the reward of Paradise to a servant who has been so faithful as you have been all your life. Prostrate on the ground I ask your holy blessing.

"Your unworthy daughter, Sister Catherine, a sinner at the feet of Jesus. "Farewell."

Some more words follow, but age has rendered them illegible.

She always spoke and wrote in this way, and took the lowest offices, especially in the infirmary, as we have related, to show, by her works, that she was the vilest person in the monastery.

When it was her turn to read any thing, in choir, or in the refectory, she was in the habit of

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asking one of the nuns beforehand, frequently junior to herself, to see if she could do it right. She conversed more willingly with those of low and humble condition, than with greater and more illustrious persons. Hence it was impossible for her to hear herself praised, or called a saint, with patience and quietness, for instance: once when she was sub-prioress, she was standing at the door, giving some orders to the stewards, and a poor countrywoman, who had come to be cured of the dropsy, had the good fortune to find her there. She did not know her, and told her to call the saint, but Catherine could not contain her humility, and answered: "Saint, indeed, saint! all the nuns are good to a certain degree, but there are no saints here, the saints are in Paradise," and having said this she locked the door. But Sister Lena Nardi, the Porteress, and other nuns who happened to be there, awakened her charity by begging her at least to give her blessing to the poor woman, lest she should go back disappointed, and Catherine opening the door again, called the sick woman, and made the sign of the cross on her forehead, telling her to go into the church, and recommend herself to St. Vincent, from whom she would obtain her cure, which she did, as the servant of God immediately began to pray for her.

The Lord sometimes revealed the evil state of the souls of others to her, that she might assist them with her prayers and penances, and showed her that it was those sins which had nailed Him to the cross, and caused His passion, which made

her burst into a flood of tears, and her grief was increased by thinking of herself, and reflecting that she wept for the sins of others, when she ought not to have ceased for an instant from lamenting her own.

The great concourse of people who came from Prato, Florence, and other parts of Tuscany to speak to her, gave extreme pain to her humility, and unless she had been prevented by obedience, she would generally have hidden herself. Once when she had a presentiment that some ladies were coming to see her, she concealed herself behind a bush of fennel in the garden, and another time in the wardrobe where the silk was kept, in which the nuns subsequently found her in an ecstasy, and lastly, in the dovecote, as has been described.

When our saint found that the concourse of people who came to see her in her ecstasies did not diminish, but, on the contrary, increased, and that the superiors could not refuse leave to many great personages who wished to see her to enter the monastery, because there was no enclosure observed in those days, she told her guardian that she had prayed the Most High with great fervour, either to take her out of the world or to cause her long ecstasies of twenty-eight hours, and the appearance of her stigmata, ring, and other favours to cease, and not to allow her to speak when she was in ecstasy, lest they should write down her words, and ended by begging the help of her prayers. She was frequently heard to express these sentiments in the follow-

ing manner, whilst she was in her ecstasies: "O my Spouse, veil these gifts which Thou hast given me, and cover them from the eyes of others, or hide me in the earth: I do not say this because I wish to conceal Thy gifts and graces, but because I think that it seems dishonourable to Thy Divine Majesty to have placed them in such a vile creature." Another time she said, "O Jesus, my love, I beseech Thee to take away Thy visible gifts from me, for I cannot bear them to be seen any longer in such a vile creature; I cannot, O Lord, endure such confusion any more. Thou art able to console me, and what does it cost Thee to do it? Thou knowest what a heavy cross these visible favours are to me; give them, therefore, to another, and I will not fail to love and serve Thee every moment, if Thou dost continue to give me Thy grace, without which I cannot do anything, and with which I can do everything." Believing herself utterly unworthy of being heard, she begged the nuns to obtain this from the Divine clemency with their prayers. The feelings of her superiors who found that the ever-increasing crowds who came to see her, particularly on Friday, was no small disturbance to the quiet and holy retirement of the monastery, coincided with hers, and they ordered the nuns to pray fervently that God would remove His evident favours; in the confidence that He would hear them, as He had heard the Blessed Gertrude, Helena of Hungary, and Lucy of Narni, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, when He took away

the outward signs of their ecstasies, stigmata, rings, and crowns of thorns, with which He had favoured them.

After some time the Lord heard the prayers of His servant and the nuns, and from the year 1554, her long ecstasy never returned, although she continued to experience it mentally, and to have the shorter ecstasies as usual, nor did the stigmata or ring disappear, but were visible after her death. The numbers and curiosity of the people who came to see her ecstasy on Thursday and Friday, were diminished by the cessation of it, and the monastery was freed from the importunity of the nobility who wished to enter it in order to see her, and the only trouble which remained, which was a great one to her humility and love of retirement, was that she had to listen to a great many people who came to tell her all their sorrows and afflictions, in the hope of being relieved by her prayers. She would not have done this, unless she had been constrained by obedience, and this audience was one of the heavy crosses which she was obliged to suffer for the rest of her life.

Another heavy cross was imposed upon her humility when her superiors obliged her to accept the office of sub-prioress, which they did because they could no longer resist the pressing instances of those who came to speak to her, and in her quality of sub-prioress it was her duty to go with the prioress to the grate or to the door, so that every one had the consolation of seeing and speaking to her. This was done in the year 1547,

when she was only in her twenty-sixth year, contrary to the custom of that monastery, where only the nuns most advanced in years are elected to this office. She, who with all her power fled from the honours of this world, beheld her promotion with real anguish, and begged her Divine Spouse with the greatest earnestness to free her from the burthen, but she was not heard; and on the other hand, she showed herself more worthy of it every day, by her rare prudence and exact observance of the rules and constitutions, and the zeal that she showed in causing them to be observed by all the others. These virtues were remarked by the nuns, and they made her superioress for the remainder of her life, which lasted forty-four years, electing her first sub-prioress and then prioress, which last post she filled seven different times, in spite of her strong repugnance and the feeling of her unworthiness, and her fear of some omission that might displease her Divine Spouse, and of giving a bad example to her subjects. But God, to whom her goodness was well known, and who preserved it by His grace, that she might become a true mistress and model to all, comforted her and encouraged her to accept this charge, and not to object when it was imposed upon her by obedience, so she received it in silence without changing any of her humble ways. When she had to give an order, she did it with so much love and benignity, that her subjects became enamoured of obedience, and such was the sweetness and gentleness with which she corrected them, that her reproofs were agreeable to

all, and yet she could not bear to let a whole day pass without consoling those whom she had reproved with loving words. Sometimes she went so far as to beg their pardon, and explained to them how she had given them a penance in order to lighten the pains of purgatory which they had deserved by their faults, and her gentle advice always made them perform their penances with good will, and correct their imperfections while their wish to be governed by her was increased. And even when she was superioress, she employed herself by preference in the lowest and most humble offices of the monastery, and esteemed it an injury if she was prevented from doing so by any of the nuns, for it was her greatest pleasure to serve every one. She never formed a resolution without consulting the nuns, and willingly deferred to the opinion of the most experienced; she was always frightened when she had to speak in public, believing herself incapable of putting two words together; it distressed her greatly to hear herself praised, and she reprimanded whoever did so. She strictly forbade the nuns to talk about her spiritual gifts and ecstasies, and because she had heard that some of the nuns had committed to writing a great many facts of her life, about her ecstasies and the sermons that she made during them, she secretly sought for these notes one day in all the cells, and the most secret recesses of the monastery, and when she found them she put them all into a bag which she took to Sister Taddea, the lay-sister who baked the bread, and commanded her to burn it in her pre-

sence, saying, "Burn these writings at once, for woe to us, if they are discovered." The bread was taken out of the oven, and when the lay-sister had put the bag into it, Sister Catherine stirred it with the poker, lest the smallest fragment should remain unburnt. The nuns' sorrow when they were informed by the lay-sister of this circumstance is hardly credible, for they were thus deprived of the best and most curious information about her ecstasies, and all her saintly actions.

But it was not the intention of the Divine Providence that all these notices of her life should be lost, and although in her humility she burnt a great number, enough remained in still more hidden corners to furnish materials for some memoirs which were written before the processes of her life were instituted, and accounts of the sermons and discourses she made in her ecstasies, though a great many facts were entirely concealed by her own efforts, which tended to keep all her ecstasies, raptures, and heavenly privileges, unknown to the world, lest a door should ever be opened to vain thoughts in her heart; and she said, with reference to this, in one of her ecstasies, "Thou knowest that through Thy grace, not even the first movements of vanity have arisen in my heart, nor shall they ever arise, because Thou hast laid Thy hand upon it."

CHAPTER XV.

OF THE HEROIC MANNER IN WHICH THE SAINT EXERCISED THE FOUR CARDINAL VIRTUES.

It would be impossible, even in the most summary manner, to relate St. Catherine's virtues one by one, without forgetting how small a space is allowed to a mere compendium, therefore we shall only touch upon them.

If we consider the constancy and fortitude with which she retired from the world to shut herself up in a poor cloister, and how much was necessary to oppose the will of her parents, we shall see that the virtue of Prudence, which regulates all the others, by illustrating the intellect, and directing the will in the choice of those means which are best adapted to the attainment of eternal happiness, reigned in Catherine's mind when she was a child, and her exactness in observing not only the Divine precepts, but also the vows and constitutions which she professed, showed that it continued to rule her actions during her whole life.

She not only displayed the utmost prudence in the direction of her own conduct, but she guided others by her advice, her prayers, and exhortations, with so much wisdom, that an immense number of persons of every rank and con-

dition, both ecclesiastical and secular, came to the monastery to recommend themselves to her prayers, and consult her, both as to the means of saving their souls, and of conducting the most important affairs, which always prospered when they adhered faithfully to her advice, but whenever they deviated from it they fell into great affliction.

On account of her singular prudence which far exceeded her years, the nuns thought that they would make her sub-prioress, and then prioress, while she was still very young. Catherine opposed this promotion with all her strength, and begged the general not to confirm her election, as is required by the rules of the order, or to exempt her from being obliged to obey the prior and provincial, who required her to accept these dignities, but always in vain, for although the general sometimes granted her the desired permission, the nuns exerted themselves so energetically about it, that he retracted the exemptions, and she was again compelled to become prioress of the monastery. In this office she governed it more by her example than by her orders, treating all with equal love; she waited upon the sick, helped those who were in want, comforted the pusillanimous, admonished the tepid to be more diligent in the service of the monastery, and was so compassionate towards all, that they saw that she thought herself more happy in serving them all than in commanding; and, in fine, carried out with all sweetness and prudence that precept of the rule of St.

Augustine, which is prescribed to the Order of Preachers, that the superior, "appetat potius amari quam timeri."

When she was prioress she wished that all her subjects should be alike in their life, and in their food and clothing; she endeavoured to keep up a great simplicity in their actions, and was a great enemy to affectation or research in speaking. She never seemed wearied by the applications that were made to her by her subjects, but listened to them with the greatest patience; and, as monastic prudence recommends, allowed them every indulgence that was consistent with the modesty of a religious life.

When she was obliged to speak in public, she did so with great reluctance, and at the same time with modesty and gentleness, never overlooking the transgressions which she saw or knew of; she did the same in her ecstasies, sometimes addressing her subjects in the person of God, sometimes in that of the most Holy Virgin, and of St. Dominic, according to the festivals which were kept at the time, so that the nuns listened to her and corrected their faults with pleasure.

But her prudence displayed itself in the most striking manner in the year 1577, during her priorate, when their Dominican superiors ordered that the door between the monastery and the public church should be closed; this was the door behind which she was often accustomed to pray, that she might be less seen, and nearer to the Blessed Sacrament. Immediately she received these orders she transmitted them to the work-

men employed by the monastery, that it might be built up, but this, as soon as the circumstance was known, produced a great disturbance in the monastery, for the nuns feared that by means of this the fathers intended to introduce the rule of strict enclosure, to which they were not bound, the Third Order of St. Dominic having been exempted from it by Papal authority, expressed in two Constitutions of Julius II. This opposition reached the ears of the workmen, who reported it to the prioress and the nuns, that they might order whatever they judged most fit, and the saint, whose obedient heart was much pained by it, fearing that greater evils might arise from these discussions, suspended the execution of the order till she had spoken to them all singly, and had appeased the discord which had arisen, by advising them not to resist the commands of their superiors. Her loving exhortations produced the desired effect, and they consented to the door being closed, protesting, however, that they wished first to be assembled in chapter, and that the notes should be registered by the notary. She was obliged to accede to their request, as the prioress has not power to decide anything important without the sanction of the chapter; and not only convoked all the sisters who had received the veil, but even the novices and the lay-sisters, as they said it was a point which related to the profession of every one; their number amounted to one hundred and forty-eight, excluding herself and the sub-prioress.

As appears from the report drawn up on the

17th of April, 1577, the chapter consented to the closing of the door, "since they could not do otherwise;" and some, moreover, protested that if it was the intention of the Fathers to establish a strict enclosure, they wished to return to their homes, while some stated that they absolutely opposed this plan; and some others refused to remain any longer subject to the order of the religious, and wanted to place themselves under the jurisdiction of the Bishop, since the religious were desirous of bringing in novelties that were contrary to the profession that they had made, and to their privileges; and this they said without reflection, because they thought that it was merely the wish of the Fathers to introduce a strict enclosure, and perhaps also because they were not aware that the Fathers had sent this order in execution of the Apostolic Constitutions of St. Pius V.

Then the saint, together with her sub-prioress, said, that having received a command from the father prior of the convent to close the door, she would not disobey her superiors, but as it was a case which concerned all the nuns, she had convoked them to a chapter, and notified the matter to them, wishing that the will of each should be written down, and that she and the sub-prioress were about to ratify the command, in compliance with the vote of the chapter, that they might not be wanting in their duty towards God, and their obligations to their mothers, sisters, and daughters. This most prudent expedient of allowing the nuns to vent their feelings

in protests, restored tranquillity to the monastery, and the order was put in force without any further difficulties.

She was not less exact in observing the virtue of justice in all that concerned her; she was most punctual in fulfilling the Divine precepts, and the three vows and the constitutions, which she had promised to keep; and she sought, by assiduous prayers, holy meditations, and incessant penances, to render due thanks to God for all the singular benefits which He had conferred on her, and to preserve herself from all sin with the help of His grace, which she always humbly prayed for, that it might protect her from all the wiles of the devil, especially in her ecstasies. She said so to Father Francesco Romeo, and was often heard to pray in these words during her ecstasies: "I entreat Thee, O Lord, to prevent me from being deluded by the devil; take away his power, reveal his fraud, because I am greatly afraid of his deceits." She said this, although her obedience in making the trial of her ectasies prescribed by her superiors, and the assurance she once received from her Divine Spouse, made her certain that she was not misled by the devices of hell. She further said, in another ecstasy, "I beseech Thee, my Spouse, to keep me under Thy especial care and protection, lest I should be deceived, for I am in great fear of the devil's stratagems, though I know that these favours come from Thy hand. Thou hast promised that Thou will not let me be deceived, and I am certain that Thou wilt keep Thy promise, but I am

afraid that I shall commit some fault, which will force Thee to abandon me. Oh if the nuns could see the terror that I have of falling, they would have no fear of my feeling a vain complacency in these ecstasies, for when I consider what I am, and knowing myself to be the vilest creature upon earth, I should be indeed deprived of reason if I felt vain-glory for that which not only is not mine, but of which I am unworthy." This shows how justly she attributed all the good that was in her to God, and all the evil to herself, as a most vile creature.

She was equally zealous in causing others to attribute everything that was good to God, and to observe all His precepts, and the rules of their order; and she helped them by means of counsels, alms, and exhortations to satisfy their obligations.

Her fortitude displayed itself with the greatest vigour when she was a child, in her renunciation of the goods of this world, and her choice of a cloister, where a life of poverty and austerity was led, and taught her to suffer all the troubles which came upon her, when her father refused to let her become a nun, or when she had to submit to the most minute examinations about the truth of her ecstasies, with a firm and tranquil mind.

She bore the many illnesses, which came heavily and frequently upon her, with heroic patience, and instead of giving the least sign of impatience, thanked God who sent her the great sufferings which she bore to atone for her neighbours' sins,

and those which were caused by the delicacy of her constitution. The physicians were filled with astonishment, and praised God in His creature, when they witnessed her patience, which was also remarkable in the joy of heart with which she suffered the cruel pains of her stigmata and crowning with thorns.

She heard of the death of her parents, brothers, and sisters with no less submission to the will of God; nor was she ever troubled when the nuns, who had not understood her goodness, ridiculed her as a hypocrite, or when her superiors reproved her sharply to try her; nor did her patience and fortitude desert her up to her last breath.

We might also mention the rigorous temperance through which she was contented to live upon poor and scanty food during the whole of her life.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS, PROPHECIES, AND APPARITIONS OF ST. CATHERINE.

In order to render Catherine's sanctity more wonderful, God deigned to reveal many of the secrets of futurity to her, which is a grace He is accustomed to confer upon holy souls. She predicted the death of Father Ginnesio da Lucca, which we have described, and told Margarita

Strozzi, who was married to the Commissario of Prato, Ristoro Serristoro, and Maria Maddalena Ridolfi, the wife of Roberto Ubaldini, that their husbands would die, and that the former would retire to St. Vincent's monastery for the remainder of her life, and that the latter would become a nun there, both which prophecies were verified. She assured Filippo Salviati, many years before it happened, that only three of his daughters would become nuns in this monastery; and informed Maria Riscoli, Maria Cini, and Maria Barducci, when they were children living in their father's house, that in process of time they would take the veil in this monastery; and also predicted that Vincenza Monaldi would marry, and would give all her children to God, which was verified by the event, for of her three daughters and two sons, two daughters became nuns in the monastery which is called di Foligno at Florence, and the other in St. Vincent's monastery, while the two sons became religious of the Order of St. Dominic.

She consoled Alessandra Nerli, the wife of Averardo Salviati, who had no sons, by telling her that she would shortly give birth to some, as the event proved; and she said the same with the same result to Caterina Salviati, the wife of Giovanni Niccolini who grieved for the death of her only son.

She persuaded Margarita Baroncelli to become a nun in St. Vincent's monastery, warning her that unless she did so she would have many troubles, which in effect she suffered after having

married. She also said that Marcantonio Ubaldini, who was determined to go and marry a Roman against his mother's wishes, would take a wife in Florence according to her desire, as it turned out; for when he was on the point of setting out for Rome he was reduced to the last extremity by illness, and after his recovery determined to marry in Florence as she wished to do.

When the Grand Duchess Jane of Austria, wife of the Grand Duke Francis, brought their child the Princess Mary to the monastery of St. Vincent, the saint said to her, "My little child, you will one day be queen, you will endure many tribulations, which you will overcome; but I exhort you to be devout to the most holy Mary." She was afterwards married to Henry IV. of France, and had to suffer a great deal.

She assured Sister Caterina Puccetti, a nun in St. Vincent's convent, that her mother, who was on the brink of the grave, would not die; and told Ginevra Ceffini that her husband would soon be out of danger; and they both recovered.

In the beginning of the year 1552 she foretold the death of her uncle Father Timoteo Ricci, who was then prior of the convent of St. Dominic at Perugia, and further convoked the nuns at the exact hour of the evening on which he died, and told them to pray for his soul, because he had been their confessor for many years. The nuns were surprised at this announcement, and asked how she knew that he was dead, but she only answered that she knew it for certain; and after a few days the news of his death arrived,

and finding that he had expired at the very hour in which she convoked the nuns, they saw that she must have known it by Divine inspiration.

She told Father Tommaso Cambi, Confessor of St. Vincent's, that she would be present at his death; and we will conclude this short compendium of the many prophecies she made, with the following one, which she made on the night in which she died. She said that her brother, Vincenzo Ricci, would labour under many difficulties and trials, and begged Sister Maria Benigna Acciajoli to console him, and to tell him that she would assist him, while he should not lose courage, but should trust in God, for he would overcome all his difficulties, which was verified in process of time.

God, however, wished to render it more evident that He had given Catherine the gift of prophecy in reward for her great love towards Him, and thus she prophesied some future things which could come from Him alone, and the first time she did this was her promising Sister Margherita Ricasoli that she should feel what an act of true love of God was; and subsequently, when she was prioress, Sister Margherita refused to accept a charge which she put into her hands unless she redeemed her promise, whereupon she said, "Never mind it, you will feel it;" and in fact after a few days she was so inflamed with the love of God that her heart seemed consumed by love. The second time was when her sister, Maria Benigna Ricci, who was a nun in the same monastery, was at the point of death, and some

relations of Sister Maria Grazia Capponi and Sister Felice Ricasoli came to assist at their clothing, Saint Catherine, who was sub-prioress, not wishing to disturb this function by her absence, nor yet to be away from her sister in her last moments, commanded her not to die until the ceremony was over, and she could be present. After the clothing she went back to her sister, and said, "Now you may die," and then began to pray and went into an ecstasy, and her sister expired, which made it evident to the sisters who assisted, how great God's love for Sister Catherine must be since He made her worthy to command death itself which is entirely in His own hands.

The Lord not only enriched His servant with the gift of prophecy, but also gave her light to penetrate the hearts of others, which gift is most singular, inasmuch as He said He would reserve it for Himself. Catherine showed that she possessed this gift when, during her ecstasy, she saw what sign Father Nicolo Michelazzi the provincial required when he sent Sister Eufrasia Mascalzoni to watch her, as we have related above; nor was this the only instance of her reading other people's hearts when she was in ecstasy, for when people asked her to obtain some favour for them while she was in ecstasy, she blessed them the same number of times as were the favours that they requested.

The nuns were well aware of her penetration of hearts when she became prioress, for she used to admonish many of them, in choir or out of

choir, not to let their thoughts wander to such and such things, but to fix them on Jesus their Spouse, so that several nuns shunned her, lest she should reprove them for their thoughts, but this was a great inducement to guard their thoughts instead of letting them wander on things that they ought not, for fear of being corrected by her.

This was the case with strangers as well as with the nuns themselves. A father of the company of Jesus once came to the grate to ask for her, and being told that she was ill in bed, said he would return another day, and they were not to mention his coming to her, which the porteresses obeyed; but the saint, in spite of that, called her sister Beatrice Ricci, and told her to take ten little figures of angels, which are made in that monastery, and give them from her to the Jesuit Father, who was at the grate. She did so at once, but when she got to the grate, she found that the father had gone a few minutes before. She sent the porter to call him back, and gave him the ten angels from Sister Catherine, which astonished him very much, for he had never told any one that he had come to ask her for that very number of angels.

By this supernatural light she was enabled to prevent much mischief by warning many persons not to commit that sin that they were determined to do.

In fine, she was so devoted to the assistance of souls, that every time her help was asked, even from a distance, she seeing their wants, by a

double miracle appeared to them to bring them relief. She appeared, as we have said, to Filippo Salviati, who doubted of the truth of her espousals with Jesus, and leaving him certain of it; she appeared to him again on another occasion, when she was deeply afflicted, and showed him for his greater consolation the Infant Jesus, assuring him that He would be his reward, both which facts he attested in letters which he wrote, particularly on the approach of his death, to Sister Jacopa Cini, which letters are still preserved in the monastery.

We feel also bound to relate another circumstance mentioned in those letters which Filippo himself attributed to the saint, and occurred in the following manner. He was travelling with his family to Bologna; but, while crossing the summit of the Apennines, was overtaken by such a tremendous snow-storm that he mistook the way, and lost sight of his family. In this perilous situation, surrounded by the snow, afraid of moving lest he should fall down a precipice, and afflicted by the loss of his family, he invoked the assistance of the Almighty, and heard a voice which said, "Build a church for the monastery of St. Vincent." He bound himself at once to do so, and the tempest abating, he perceived his family in the distance, and not only rejoined them, but was able to save the lives of all, and he executed his promise on his return to Prato, during Sister Catherine's life-time.

The circumstance relating to Bernardo Ricasoli was still more astonishing. When he was about

to be sent on an embassay to the Grand Duke of Bavaria, he begged his mother to recommend him to Sister Catherine's prayers, which she did, and Sister Catherine promised to comply with this request. On the day of his departure, as soon as he was without the gates of Florence, he saw a lady in the dress of a Dominican nun in the air above his horse's head, who accompanied him until his arrival at the residence of the Grand Duke, and throughout his journey home. After giving an account of his embassay, he went to Prato, to return the due thanks to Sister Catherine, whose prayers had brought about a happy termination of his affairs, and to relate what he saw on the road. On his arrival at the monastery, he saw Sister Catherine at a distance, and exclaimed, although he had never seen or spoken to her before; "This is the nun who accompanied me during my journey." He sent for her in order to thank her, but she turned off the conversation from herself with much modesty and skill.

Father Agostino da Siena, an Augustinian, was also indebted to her for help in great danger. As he was fording a river on horseback, his horse fell down, and he would have been drowned, had not Catherine, whose aid he implored, appeared to him, and saved him. She appeared too to the Grand Duchess, Jane of Austria, wife of Francis I. of Tuscany, to comfort and assist her in her last illness, as she informed her assistants. Finally omitting the relation of many other appari-

tions, we shall refer the reader to her visit to St. Philip Neri in Rome, described in chapter eleven.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE MIRACLES WROUGHT BY ST. CATHERINE DURING HER LIFETIME, AND THE GREAT FAME OF HER SANCTITY.

She obtained from God, besides the gifts we have enumerated, the power of working miracles; her blessing alone, as we have described, cured a woman afflicted with the dropsy, restored the rotten wheat to its original soundness, healed a poor lay-sister's infectious disease of the head, and another whose complaint was so infectious, that no one dared to administer any remedies to her, and being prioress, when Sister Alessandra Velluti showed her an inveterate swelling on her arm, to exempt herself from an office which she wished to entrust her with, she replied, making the sign of the cross over her, "Go, and do as you are told, for God will assist you," and Sister Alessandra found herself perfectly cured. She freed Sister Maria Arcangiola Leoni, from an attack of erysipelas, in the same manner, adding, that she would never be troubled by it again, and she cured Castanza de Bonis of the same malady. She likewise delivered Nicolò de Bruni from an evil spirit by the sign of the cross.

In the year 1543, Maria Gualterotti, the wife of

Filippo Salviati, was reduced to the last extremity and given over by the doctors, but her husband sent to entreat Sister Catherine to pray for her, and she appeared to her and cured her.

Again, Antonio Bruni who was on his deathbed, had received the last sacraments, and was in his last agony, but Caterina Salvatici, his wife, went to St. Vincent's to recommend him to Catherine's prayers. She gave him a small written paper with directions to place it on his head, which being done he immediately recovered his health ; upon which his wife went back to the monastery to thank Sister Catherine, taking with her one of her daughters who was hardly able to stand upright or to walk, to ask for her prayers, and the servant of God drew her towards herself within the monastery, touched her sides, and then said to the mother, " You tell me that this little girl is lame, but see how well and uprightly she walks," and, indeed, from that time forward she was quite well, and walked with ease to her mother's great astonishment. This miracle was approved by the Auditors of the Rota, and mentioned first of the five miracles which they adduced in their request to Urban VIII., to proceed to her beatification.

It is not to be wondered at that in consequence of her remarkable privileges and miracles, the fame of her holiness was spread, even during her lifetime, through the whole of Europe, so that besides the crowds who went to Prato to see and speak with her, the first princes of Europe sent to ask for her prayer, all calling her the holy nun.

Maria Salviati, mother of Cosmo I., who was

invested by St. Pius V. with the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany, went to Prato to see whether the reports she had heard of Catherine were true, and found her in an ecstasy. After watching her with great admiration for a long time, she told the nuns she had never seen anything so admirable in her life, for her face was so beaming with holiness that it seemed rather that of an angel than of an earthly mortal, and she advised the nuns to keep her clothes as relics. After St. Catherine had returned to her senses, she begged her to write some prayers in her book with her own hand, and desired on her death-bed that they should be preserved as relics, saying that they would certainly work miracles, because they had been written by Sister Catherine de' Ricci. Although this lady related everything she had seen at Prato to her son and to her whole court, there still remained a shade of doubt in their minds, so the next March, 1544, the Duchess Leonora of Toledo, wife of Cosmo, went there unexpectedly with other ladies and noblemen, as we have already related. (Chap. 8.)

The Grand Duchess Jane of Austria, wife of Francis I., also went to see her with her daughter Mary, who was afterwards Queen of France, as Sister Catherine predicted to her. (Chap. 16.)

Cammilla Martelli, the last wife of Cosmo I., Bianca Capello, second wife of Francis I., Christina of Lorraine, wife of Ferdinand I., all three Grand-Duchesses of Tuscany, Vincent Duke of Mantua, and Leonora his consort, the Duchess of Ferrara, the Princess Leonora Orsini who was

married to the Duke Sforza, went to visit her; and the Duke of Bavaria sent his own son to speak to her. The King of Spain sent his ambassador to consult her upon various doubts, as was attested by the confessor of the monastery, Father Tommaso Cambi, who was present at their conference, and listened to her solution of his difficulties with great admiration.

Many also of the cardinals went to Prato for the sole purpose of seeing her, as it was commonly believed at the time, for since her death no similar dignitaries have visited the monastery. Besides the cardinals Alessandrino and Pucci, who were sent there by St. Pius, Cardinal Cervini, who was subsequently Pope, under the name of Marcellus II., Cardinal Medici, who became Pope Leo XI., and Cardinal Aldobrandini, who was afterwards Pope under the name of Clement VIII., the Cardinals Gaddi, Niccolini, Caffarelli, and Giustiniani, and many other prelates went to see her, and returned much edified by her goodness and holiness.

Such was her reputation, that the greater part of the nuns who were in the monastery at the time of her death, had chosen it on account of her holiness, and many rich persons gave large alms to help to build it, and to endow it, in order that the nuns might live in a perfect community, without having to beg for their support, as they were obliged to do when Saint Catherine entered it.

The noble Filippo Salviati spent more than 30,000 dollars on the buildings of the monastery,

because of his veneration for Saint Catherine, and out of gratitude for the benefits which he had received from her, and the Grand-Duke Cosmo used to consider this immense alms as one of the miracles wrought by Saint Catherine, for Salviati was extremely prudent and moderate in his expenses. His sons, Antonio and Averardo, imitated his generosity. Antonio Gondi left 6,000 dollars to the monastery out of admiration for the saint, for he had no daughters in the monastery, but was in the habit of going there frequently to see her. Tommaso Ginori left his great estate of Settimelo to the monastery for the same reason, upon condition that, during Catherine's life-time, the rents should be distributed in alms at her discretion. Margherita Strozzi de' Serristori gave the saint 1,000 dollars for the necessities of the monastery every time that she was elected prioress, besides the alms which she frequently gave her for poor girls. Saint Catherine was in the habit of praying continually that God would help her benefactors in their wants especially their spiritual ones.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE SAINT'S LAST ILLNESS AND HAPPY PASSAGE TO ANOTHER LIFE.

The hour in which God had determined to reward our saint's merits with eternal glory was

preceded and accompanied by sure signs of her holy perseverance to the end. She fell ill on the 23rd of January, in the year 1590, according to the Roman reckoning, and 1589 according to the Florentine reckoning. At this time a comet was seen over the city of Prato by many of the nuns and other persons out of the monastery, which resembled a great star, much larger than the others, from which a ray fell perpendicularly upon the saint's cell. It was visible for five or six days, and was considered by the learned to be a presage of the death of the servant of God, especially as it disappeared after she expired.

She was assailed by a violent fever, accompanied by severe pains at nine o'clock in the evening, which continued until the 27th of the same month, when a retention of urine began, which complaints were principally caused by her austerities, and fifty years abstinence. The disease continued to rage, in spite of the physicians' diligence in applying remedies, for they venerated her very much, and the grief of every one was great, as they foresaw that they were about to lose her, while their admiration for her unwearied patience continually increased. She never lost the placidity of her countenance, and was always returning thanks to God, for giving her such a good opportunity of suffering, and praying that her pains might continue and increase. On the last day of the month the doctors ordered her to take some turpentine, which had frequently occasioned her great sufferings, and even put her in danger of choking; wherefore she made her confession

the evening before she was to take it, and asked for the holy Sacraments, and with tears in her eyes begged pardon of all the nuns, and endeavoured to persuade them that she had not been so good as they thought, but on the contrary, a great sinner, and a trouble to all; and she went on to exhort them to keep up the regular observance of their rule, and community life, assuring them that so long as they were exact in their obedience to the constitutions she would always pray to God for them, if, through the infinite merits of Jesus, she was allowed to enjoy Him for all eternity.

There were two small altars in the cell, over one of which was a crucifix, and over the other an image of the Blessed Virgin with Jesus in her arms, to which she walked, supported by her dear sisters, and remained a long time in prayer before each of them, ending by resigning herself to the will of God, and offering herself willingly to do whatever that blessed will had marked out for her. She implored the most Holy Trinity, who had condescended to create her after the Divine image and likeness, to show mercy to her soul, to forgive her sins, and to grant her eternal life; then she turned to the Blessed Virgin, and prayed her, the advocate and the mother of sinners, not to abandon her, but ever to help her; she begged the holy angels to protect her from the snares of the evil spirits in the last hours of her life; and she entreated the saints, especially Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas Aquinas, St. Vincent, Saint Mary Magdalen, St. Ursula,

and St. Thecla, to obtain for her final perseverance and an increase of all virtues.

After all this preparation she asked the infirmarian to divide the turpentine into five pills, and turning to the crucifix, she said, "My Jesus, I am about to take these pills in honour of Thy five most sacred wounds; and as these are given me as medicine for the body, so, O Lord, mayest Thou by Thy most holy wounds heal my soul." After these words she took the turpentine through pure obedience, although she foresaw what great suffering it would cause her.

About the time of vespers of the same day she became worse, and the nuns decided to carry the crucifix, which had sometimes spoken to her, in procession to her, from the oratory where it had been placed. As soon as she saw it she asked them to place it in her arms, and gave vent to her love by tears, and kisses, and loving words, praying at the same time for her eternal salvation. When these prayers were ended, a great noise was heard outside the cell, as if the monastery were falling down, which was considered by the nuns to have been caused by the devil's rage against our saint.

On the following morning, which was the 1st of February, the vigil of the Purification of the most holy Virgin, the doctors advised her to receive the Viaticum, for which she prepared herself by confession, and prayed for an hour, sitting upon the bed, during which time they thought she was in ecstasy, for she was motionless, and coughed at the end as she did when

she awoke from an ecstasy. She said, when she returned to her senses, "It is necessary to be resigned to the will of God," which words pierced the nuns' hearts, as they understood by them that God was about to take her from them. When she heard the sacred Viaticum approaching her cell, she rose from her bed and went forward, saying, "Behold my Jesus, let us go to meet Him;" and as soon as It entered she knelt down, supported by the nuns, who saw her face so resplendent, that it looked like an angel's, while she, all on fire with Divine love, said, "My Jesus, I thank Thee for all the favours that Thou hast done me, and art still doing me, by condescending to come to me, and by Thy most sacred wounds I commend my soul into Thy hands." She then asked the nuns' pardon a second time, particularly for having perhaps refused to satisfy their wishes, and assured them that this had not been caused by want of affection, for she loved them all equally, but only by ignorance, and she said the *Confiteor* with many tears.

She made the ordinary protest of belief, that in the sacrament there present was contained the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that she believed all that our holy mother the Roman Church believes, and received the holy Viaticum with the greatest devotion, praying that Jesus would purify her with His Precious Blood, so as to receive Him worthily: and thus she spent a long time in prayer.

She received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction in her bed, in the evening of the same day, and

when she was given the crucifix to kiss, broke out in most fervent acts of love towards Jesus, recommending her nuns to Him; and although she laboured under great pain, she sent for the postulants who had been received into the monastery to become nuns, and encouraged them to persevere; she next sent for the lay-sisters, then the novices, after these the young nuns, and lastly, the mothers, exhorting them all, according to their condition, to strict observance of their rule, with so much wisdom, that she astonished not only the nuns who were present to the number of one hundred and fifty, but also Father Tommaso Cambi, the confessor, who was there.

After these profitable warnings, she employed the remaining hours of her life in meditating upon the Passion of Jesus, as her actions and ejaculations manifested, and at the same time many of the nuns heard sweet songs, apparently sung by angelic voices, the burden of which was, as far they could understand, *Veni sponsa Christi*, Come, O Spouse of Christ, which continued a quarter of an hour, at the end of which the saint stretched out her arms and placed her feet one above the other as if she were on the cross, and having closed her own eyes, as she used to do those of the nuns who died, she gave up her soul in perfect peace to her Creator, at the beginning of the 2nd day of February, which is dedicated to the Purification of Mary most holy. She lived in this world sixty-seven years, nine months, and seven days, and served Jesus her Spouse as a nun of the Third Order of Saint

Dominic fifty-four years, and governed Saint Vincent's monastery for forty-four years.

The grief of the nuns at losing such a beloved sister and venerated mother is not to be described, but their grief was partly calmed by looking at her corpse, which was shining with light, and diffused a most fragrant odour, while her face was like an angel's, and excited feelings of devotion in those who saw it. There was no change of colour, but it seemed rather the face of a virgin who was living and in the flower of her age, than one who was dead. Her eyebrows shone with a peculiar beauty, which the nuns attributed to the punctures of the crown of thorns, which were then seen by some of them, and by some secular persons.

It was impossible to distinguish what fragrance it was that proceeded from her sanctified body, but it was like that of several flowers, particularly of violets, and was perceived by the nuns before it was laid on the bier, and ornamented with flowers, according to custom; and is even now perceived by many in her cell, and round her sepulchre, and has always been considered supernatural.

When the first lamentations were over, and her body had been dressed by some of her daughters who were most familiar with her, it was carried into the interior half of the Church, where the nuns assembled, and thence transferred the next morning to the public part of the church, which was crowded with people, who came from Florence as well as from Prato, as

soon as they heard of her death, to venerate her before her burial: and the concourse was so great of people who strove to kiss her hands, to take the flowers which were placed upon the bier, and to cut off little pieces of her habit for devotion, that they were obliged to postpone the funeral for two days. At the end of them the body was brought back within the enclosure of the monastery, and placed in a leaden coffin, within another of wood, which was put in the nuns' church and walled up, and her picture placed over it, with an inscription stating that she was buried there; and her tomb may be seen from one of the gratings of the *parlatorio*, to which great numbers of strangers as well as inhabitants of Prato, drawn by the enduring renown of her sanctity, resort, as they cannot come nearer to her sepulchre, to ask various favours, and bring many tablets as a sign of the graces and miracles they receive, but these tablets are kept in a separate room, as Urban VIII. forbade any tablets being hung on the sepulchres of those who are not yet canonized.

The saint appeared after her death to many persons who were devout to her, and in particular to one of her nieces, a secular person, who was in the monastery when her body was brought back by the nuns from the public church. She saw her clothed in her habit and mantle, kneeling before the nuns' altar, with such a beautiful light on her right shoulder, that it resembled a ray of the sun; and thinking that her aunt had risen again, she wanted to rise from her knees and go

to embrace her, but she was not able; and by the time the nuns had reached the choir the vision disappeared.

At the very hour of the night in which she died, Baccio Verzoni of Prato began to make lamentations, and his wife, who was awakened by them, enquired the cause of his distress, to which he replied, that it was the death of his benefactress, Sister Catherine of Ricci, for he had just seen her ascend all glorious to heaven in a half moon. His wife tried to console him, saying that he had only had a dream, but he answered that it was a true vision, for he had not been sleeping, and at that moment they heard the bell of the monastery rung as it was at the death of a nun, which convinced them both of the fact.

She appeared, moreover, twice to Sister Theodora, a lay-sister ninety years of age, and to some of the nuns of the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, and of that of Santa Marta in Florence, and to Saint Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, who saw her ascend into heaven, as she told her confessor, Father Vincenzo Puccini; and in the year 1602 she appeared to the nuns who accompanied Monsignor Caccia, when that prelate made the visitation of their enclosure; and in the year after her death she was seen full of splendour by Sister Filippa Dardinelli, who was praying at her sepulchre, and gave her her blessing; but we omit the account of many other apparitions, for fear of wearying our readers.

All her great and eminent virtues, her ecsta-

sies, and raptures, were examined with the greatest care by Monsignor Giovanni Battista Coccini, Monsignor Filippo Piravano, and Monsignor Clemente Merlino, to whom this charge was confided by the Sagra Rota, about the year 1625, who, having also examined her miracles, joined in the supplicatory statement that she might *safely* be beatified, presented by the Rota to Clement VIII. of glorious memory; but when this Supreme Pontiff's new decrees appeared, it was necessary that the cause should be re-examined by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and as they were occupied by several processes which were commenced long before that relating to our saint, it was postponed until they, as well as it, had been investigated, when Benedict XIII. of holy memory proclaimed, by the following decree, that her virtues had been truly heroic.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF THE VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD,

CATHERINE OF RICCI,

NUN OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS OF THE MONASTERY OF SAINT VINCENT, IN PRATO.

In the presence of His Holiness Benedict PP. XIII. on the 4th day of this month, in the year 1727, a general council of the Sacred Congregation of Rites was held, in which the cause of the beatification and canonization of the venerable servant of God, Catherine of Ricci, nun of

the Order of Preachers, of the monastery of Saint Vincent at Prato, was proposed for consultation by the reporter, the most Reverend Cardinal Origo—*whether the theological, as well as cardinal virtues, of the same venerable servant of God, are sufficient in this case and for the purpose of the Congregation*—and when first the consultors, then the most reverend cardinals, had given their votes on that question, His Holiness also, having heard them, thought fit to postpone the solution of it, that he might implore the aid of Heaven and Divine Light, as was customary in a deliberation of so important a nature; when he had done this most fervently during the ensuing days, he at length, on the undermentioned day, sacred to the angelic doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas, towards whom, during her lifetime, she felt a particular devotion, and by whom she had very frequently been loaded with special graces and favours, commanded, that the following affirmative answer to the proposed doubt should be published, viz., *that the virtues of the venerable servant of God, Catherine of Ricci, as well theological, that is to say, Faith, Hope, and Charity, as cardinal, which are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance*, and their respective attributes in a heroic degree had been proved, and thus, &c. This day, 7th of March, 1727.

N. CARDINAL COSCIA.

Loco + Sigilli.

N. M. TEDESCHI, Archbishop of Apamenus, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRACES AND MIRACLES WORKED BY GOD THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF SAINT CATHERINE AFTER HER DEATH.

Although the life of our saint was composed of miracles, and I had almost said was one continued miracle, it is as well to describe some of the miracles which the Divine Omnipotence worked after her death in regard of her merits, that her sanctity might be more fully illustrated, and that men might appeal with more confidence to her protection.

Very many were the sick who were instantaneously cured by St. Catherine's intercession. A child named Vittoria Buonaparte, who was nearly suffocated by a bad catarrh, merely recommended herself to Saint Catherine and recovered at once. Sister Maria Giacinta Strozzi, a professed nun in Saint Vincent of Prato, was freed from an abscess in her throat, which prevented her from swallowing even a drop of liquid, when the nuns brought her the saint's mantle. When Mother Veronica Marzoppini, a nun in St. Vincent's monastery, commended herself to St. Catherine's intercession, an abscess which had festered in her thigh, burst suddenly, and left her quite well. She appeared to Pietro Buonamici, a Florentine, who invoked her while suffering from an inflammation, accompanied by a malignant fever, and told him that if he wished to recover from his mortal sick-

ness, he should promise to recite the Passion of our Lord, with the Office of the Holy Cross, and to celebrate or to have celebrated a mass of the Cross; and as soon as he had made this promise he found himself cured.

They carried the relics of Catherine to Sister Domenica Puccetti, a nun of Saint Vincent's, who had the spotted fever, and they healed her at once. When Elisabetta Dardinelli was a child she was standing at the top of a high cliff, the ground gave way under her, but as she fell she called upon Saint Catherine, and although she struck against several large stones and bushes, she found herself on her feet at the foot of the cliff without having received any injury.

The Divine power worked many other miracles through Saint Catherine's merits in Prato, and also in Florence, Lucca, and Osimo, which were recognized in the trials made by the bishops of the place, but we will confine ourselves to those which were approved by the Sacred Ruota in Rome, and by the Sacred Congregation of Rites confirmed by a Pontifical decree.

Caterina Biagini was possessed by an evil spirit, of which she gave clear signs, such as frightful contortions, and speaking different languages, especially Latin, although she did not know how to read or write; and further, in spite of frequent exorcisms, she daily grew worse, until her parents touched her with some relics of our saint, and she was thenceforward perfectly free.

In the year 1621 Sigismondo Petronio was attacked by a violent spotted fever, accompanied

with delirium, and in spite of the cares of his father, a doctor by profession, was reduced to the brink of the grave. His father, finding that human means were of no avail, had recourse to supernatural ones, and begged the nuns of Saint Vincent's to give him a relic of St. Catherine to place upon his son, which he obtained with a promise that they would recommend him to the venerable servant of God; he applied the relic to his son as soon as he returned home, and the delirium subsided, and the patient recovered his health and strength so rapidly, that this cure was considered an evident miracle by all the physicians.

In Saint Vincent's itself all the wine in the cellar was spoilt, which distressed the prioress and the nuns, inasmuch as they had not the means of buying any more, so they resolved to carry some of the relics of the venerable mother processionally to the cellar, and implore her assistance in the necessity of the monastery, and in the very moment that the procession ended the wine returned to its original quality, and even became better than it was at first in the opinion of all the nuns.

The fourth miracle, which was approved by the Auditors of the Rota, was the sudden cure of Bernardino Ceparelli, a surgeon in Prato, which was effected by touching him with our saint's head-dress, after he had been given over by the doctors, who, when they returned and expected to find him dead, found him alive and

well, and were never weary of praising the wonders of God in His saints.

The same thing happened to Sister Veronica de Ricci, a nun in the same monastery and niece of the saint, who was reduced to the extremity of her life by a violent fever, and despaired of by the doctors, and when she was in this condition the nuns brought her the cloak of her aunt, praying most fervently to her for her health, which she recovered as soon as the mantle was put on, and this so completely, that she immediately dressed herself and went to the saint's tomb to return her thanks, in spite of the reluctance of the infirmarians to allow her to do so.

Although we cannot recount all the miracles which her Divine Spouse worked, and continues up to the present time to work in her favour, we must add those which were examined by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and approved by His Holiness Clement XII.

The first was the cure of Sister Caterina Alessandra Bonsi, a professed nun in the monastery of Saint Vincent, who was assailed by a violent fever, which, from the diversity of its symptoms, was at first thought erratic, yet, as the evil went on increasing for several years, and as a pulsation showed itself in the region of the heart, the case was examined with greater attention by the doctor who had attended her, and by others of the first physicians of Tuscany, who had arrived on other business in the year 1725. They found that the heart was the seat of the disease, for the pulsation clearly proceeded from thence, and

extended to the great artery; and that the spurious ribs of the left side, which were above the pulsation, as well interior as exterior, were so elevated that the patient was obliged to wear a corset without bones over that part. They also noticed that her pulse was weak and intermittent, with shortness of breath, a taste of blood, which even tinged the saliva, with coldness and incipient swelling of the extremities; and consequently they concluded that the long-continued fevers which tormented the patient arose from aneurism or dilatation of the great artery, a complaint entirely beyond the reach of the medical art. Moreover, the complaint increased from day to day, and the only remedy that the doctors could suggest, was a strict regimen, and occasional bleeding when the paroxysms were most painful and dangerous, by which some relief might be afforded.

In spite of this treatment, exactly followed by the patient, she became so weak that she could not get up, but was obliged to remain sitting on the bed supported by many pillows, only awaiting, with the assistance of the confessors, a speedy death, as the doctors had foretold, and as was threatened by the almost continual faintings which took away her speech and her breath. In this state of things she recommended herself with great devotion to the intercession of the servant of God, and on the 4th of May, 1726, had the stick which she used brought to her. She applied it with great confidence to the diseased part, and unexpectedly

heard a voice within her, say, "Rise, for you are cured," whereupon she asked for her clothes in order to get up and dress herself, but the nuns, who assisted her, thought that she was delirious, and that these were the last efforts of her life, so they recommended her to remain quiet, and to make a prayer for a happy death. She answered that she wished to dress herself because she was cured, and thereupon rose without any assistance from the bed, telling them that her mama Saint Catherine had cured her. When they saw her standing upright, who was not able even to move herself in bed, they gave her her clothes, and she dressed herself, and walked about the room with a smiling and joyful face. Her confessor, who, seeing that she became more tranquil when the saint's staff was applied to the heart, had left her a few minutes before, in order to visit the other sick, returned to be present at her death; and when he saw her, to his great amazement, walking to meet him, and exclaim with great joy, "A miracle! a miracle!" he united his voice to hers to praise the omnipotence of God in His servants, as also did the doctor, who expected to find her dead.

To the great joy of every one, seeing this unmistakeable miracle, her re-acquired health lasted for four months, during which she performed all the duties of the monastery like the other nuns; but hearing her companions say that she was very pale, which was owing to the number of times she had been bled, she gradually lost her firm faith in the health she had miraculously

obtained, and asked for some more medicine, although the nuns advised her to trust in the saint, and to ask for her intercession to obtain perfect strength without having recourse to human remedies, but without effect, for she insisted on applying to the doctors, having persuaded herself that the saint had indeed restored her to health, but had left the recovery of all her strength to her care; in fact, according to her own confession, her ingratitude towards her was such that, as she justly deserved, she fell back into her former complaint, and became even worse than she had been. In addition to her former sufferings she had a most acute pain in her head and left arm, where a new dilatation of the artery manifested itself, and the swelling grew from day to day, in spite of the plasters of lead which were applied to it, to repress the inflammation. She was thus reduced a second time to the last extremity, and the doctors judged death to be inevitable, without the interposition of another miracle. In this condition the patient entreated the saint's pardon with many tears, promising that if she would condescend to restore her to health, she would not fail to correct her fault; and while doing so heard a voice similar to the first, say, "Rise, for you are healed," to which she paid no attention until this was repeated, when she leapt from the bed, saying, "I am cured, our mama Saint Catherine has done me this favour a second time." The two nuns, who had remained to attend to her when the others had gone into choir to say ves-

pers, were in amazement, and used a little force to induce her to return to her bed, but she invariably answered that she was cured, and wanted to dress in order to go and return thanks before the sepulchre of the Venerable Catherine. She showed some strength in opening a chest where her tunic was kept, without doing the slightest injury to her diseased arm, and then went alone to the saint's sepulchre; whereupon her two attendants and her sister, who had just come to the spot, began to exclaim, a miracle! a miracle! and went into choir to inform the nuns, who went in a body to the saint's tomb, when vespers were finished, and with great wonder saw her kneeling there whom they had left on her death-bed. After this miraculous cure she performed all her monastic duties, without the slightest recurrence of her dreadful malady.

Sister Elisabetta Caterina Catani, a lay-sister in the monastery of Santa Chiara of the Seraphic Order, likewise in Prato, had been confined to her bed by sciatica from the year 1720, till she was so tormented by it, that she suffered the greatest pain when they moved her in sheets or towels, as they were obliged to do. The doctors, finding that nothing gave her any relief, left off troubling her with prescriptions. At the beginning of the year 1726 she was atttacked by fever, accompanied by universal relaxation and continual vomitings, and went on in this miserable state until the month of May, when the great miracle we have just described came to her knowledge, and inspired her with great

confidence in the merits of our saint, so she begged the nuns of her monastery to send for the saint's staff from Saint Vincent's, which, when she had received, she applied immediately to herself, commending herself to Saint Catherine, and fell into a tranquil sleep, which lasted all the night. She awoke only two or three times, and when she tried to turn herself she found that she was able to do it perfectly, and consequently that she had been cured, but she was then oppressed by sleep, and did not awake until late in the morning, when she said to a nun who was attending on her, that she was quite well, and would go to the refectory with the others. She dressed herself without any assistance, and knelt down to thank God and our saint for her newly restored health, and then walked about, to the great surprise of the nuns, who joined with her in returning thanks to God for the miracle He had worked through Saint Catherine's intercession upon this lay-sister. She henceforward did all the work with the other lay-sisters, such as cooking, baking, and the like, without feeling the slightest pain from her old complaint.

These two miracles were brought before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and after having undergone fresh trials, were confirmed by its authority, and published as true miracles by the following decree of the Sovereign Pontiff Clement XII.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF THE VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD,

CATHERINE OF RICCI.

NUN OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS IN THE MONASTERY OF ST. VINCENT AT PRATO.

In the presence of our most holy Lord, Pope Clement XII., on Tuesday, the 22nd of April, of the current year, 1732, a general Congregation of the Sacred Rites was held on the Florentine cause of the venerable servant of God, Catherine of Ricci, a nun of the order of St. Dominic, in the monastery of St. Vincent at Prato; and the most reverend Cardinal Origo, the Reporter, proposed the following doubt:—*Whether the miracles, and which of them, were sufficient for the case under consideration.* His Holiness, therefore, having heard the desires of the consultors, the most reverend cardinals judged fit to postpone his decision, according to custom, that he might implore a fuller share of heavenly light to assist them in such an important deliberation. Having executed this, on the above-mentioned day, sacred to St. Catherine of Sienna, a virgin of the same order, with whose name the aforesaid servant of God was adorned, and towards whom, during her lifetime, she bore a singular devotion, owing to the special favours which she received at her hands, he summoned the most reverend Father D. Cavalchino, Archbishop of Filippi, and me,

the undersigned secretary of the same sacred congregation before him, and commanded the following answer to be published, namely:—That besides the nine already published, the tenth miracle is proved; viz., the instantaneous cure from aneurism of Sister Caterina Alessandra de' Bonsi, a professed nun of the monastery of St. Vincent of Prato, of the order of St. Dominic, and also the eleventh; viz., the instantaneous cure of Elisabetta Cherubina Catani, a lay-sister of the monastery of St. Clare at Prato, of Ischia, as miracles of the third class, &c. Thus, &c. Given this 30th day of April, 1732.

A. F. CARDINAL ZONDADARI, Pro-Prefect.

Loco ✠ Sigilli.

N. M. FEDESCHI, Archbishop of Apamenus, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE EVENTS WHICH TOOK PLACE AFTER CATHERINE'S BEATIFICATION.

In the year 1733, which immediately followed our saint's beatification, the prioress and the nuns of the venerable monastery of St. Vincent of Prato, presented a humble supplication to the Congregation of Rites to be allowed to transfer her sacred body from their private church to the public one, which was granted by the instructions

of Monsignor, the Promoter of the Faith, and the decree of permission was sanctioned by Clement XII., of holy memory, on the 19th of September, of the same year. The Lord was pleased after the recent beatification, to grant new favours and miracles to the prayers of this His saint, and the postulator of her cause made a request through the late Cardinal Origo, the exponent of it, to have a commission for the resumption of the cause signed, which was graciously conceded by the Sacred Congregation on the 11th of December, 1733, and remissory letters were sent to the bishops and ordinaries of the city of Augusta, situated in the Valley of St. Catherine, in the diocese of Costanza, and of the city of Florence, in the year 1734, authorizing them to commence apostolic processes upon her miracles.

The processes were accordingly made, and sent to Rome, where they were opened with the accustomed forms, and ratified by the Sacred Congregation, and by our holy Lord, Benedict XIV., on the 25th of January, 1741 ; and after the ante-preparatory Congregation held before the most Eminent Cardinal Lercari, exponent of the cause, on the 8th of January, and the preparatory one, held on the 19th of November, 1743, the doubt was proposed in presence of His Holiness :—*An, et de quibus miraculis constet post indultam eidem Beatæ Venerationem in casu &c. Whether the miracles, and which of them, after the beatification, are sufficient for the case in question, &c.*

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE MIRACLES WHICH WERE APPROVED OF FOR THE CANONIZATION OF THE BLESSED CATHERINE OF RICCI.

The two miracles we are going to relate were the most evident, and the most clearly proved of all those which God worked through St. Catherine's intercession after her beatification.

The first happened in Florence, in the year 1733, to Maria Clemenza Staccioli, a girl of that city. Beside the various diseases which obliged her for several years to resort to medical advice, in 1725 she was surprised by a swelling which appeared first in her jaw, and then in her right breast, with very bad symptoms, and great pain, becoming about the size of an egg, and obliged her to disclose it. The doctor at first feared that it might be of a cancerous nature, but having noticed the sharp pain and the straining which the patient suffered whenever she moved, the erosure and universal inflammation of the breast, the strange and unequal hardness in different places, and the livid colour of others; and moreover that in spite of the suppuration of abundant matter and blood, which he procured, the pain and the other bad symptoms were not at all diminished, and that a remarkable quantity of worms appeared on the surface and round the edges of the apertures; the physicians no longer doubted, but pronounced it a genuine ulcerated

cancer. In spite of all remedies, it increased furiously, and spread through the glands and muscles, and even through the bones of her breast, and broke into seven deep holes, which reduced themselves in time into two very wide, deep, and callous ones, which communicated with each other; and in this miserable condition the suffering girl lived for eight years, until the month of June, 1733, she was attacked by a violent fever with delirium, heat, and violent agitation, which reduced her to the last extremity in a few days, and it was thought necessary to fortify her with the last sacraments of the Church. Towards the middle of the night, she heard her confessor mention the approaching festivals which were to be made in honour of the blessed Catherine of Ricci, and also the relic of a straw hat of hers, which was in the possession of the noble family of Ricci, and she conceived hopes of being cured by the intercession of the Blessed Catherine, and begged her confessor, who was also her parish priest, to bring the relic to her. On the following day he complied with her desire, and brought her the relic before bringing her the Viaticum, and placed it on the breast of the dying girl, exhorting her to put a firm trust in the merits and intercession of the Blessed Catherine, which the patient at the same time implored with great fervour. Wonderful to relate, she was freed that instant from the dreadful headache, fever, and pain in her right arm, and ulcerated breast; and she opened her eyes, and sat up in the bed, saying that she was perfectly

cured, and able to get up, which the priest would not allow, but desired her to wait till the doctor's arrival, for greater security. He came after dinner, and found her as has been described, to his extreme astonishment. About two hours after the application of the relic, the patient wanted to examine her breast, and found that the mouth nearest her right arm, which gave her the most pain, was closed and healed, while the other from which she suffered less remained open, which she showed to the doctor the next morning, on which she rose thoroughly cured, and was able to use her arm, and do all the business of the house. The next autumn she satisfied her desire of going to Prato, to return thanks to the Blessed Catherine, and to ask the nuns of St. Vincent's for a little of the oil of the lamp which burned before the saint's sepulchre, in hopes that it would complete her cure, and heal the remaining wound. She obtained the oil, and returned to Florence, and the same evening anointed the last ulcer: she felt in the night that the lint had come out, and when she re-anointed herself in the morning, she found that she was perfectly healed, and what is more singular, the wound was cicatrized, which fact was ascertained and recognized in several examinations of it made by professors in the course of the next two years; nor did she ever again suffer the smallest degree of pain or annoyance in that part.

The second miracle which they recognized was worked upon Sister Maria Maddalena Fabri, a

professed Dominican nun of the venerable monastery of Saint Catherine in the city of Augusta. This nun suffered from violent convulsions for five years, at the end of which she was delivered from them by natural remedies, or rather by fervent prayers to God and His saints, but her health was still extremely weak, and she lost it entirely soon after in a new and violent illness. In the autumn of 1729 she became a prey to pain in the joints, which was so severe, that she could not move from one place to another without the greatest difficulty and suffering. The physicians and surgeons who were called in, laboured for two years to relieve her from such an obstinate malady, but without success; on the contrary, the pain increased so much that she could scarcely drag herself about the monastery even with assistance of crutches; and whenever she tried to kneel her nerves cracked with a great noise, and the doctors gave up the case as hopeless. Her sufferings increased daily, and the nerves of the feet and thighs became contracted, so that for two months the poor religious was utterly unable to walk, and was obliged to remain immoveable upon a bed or a chair.

Thus she existed until the 9th of November, 1732, on which a solemn mass and Te Deum were sung in thanksgiving for the decree of the beatification of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci, and the sick nun got herself carried in an armchair to the oratory adjoining the church, but while assisting at high mass she was surprised by such violent pain in

both her sides, that she thought she could bear it no longer. When mass was over the Te Deum was sung, and the sick nun, filled with a lively faith, implored the Blessed Catherine's intercession most earnestly, for the recovery of her health. She had not quite finished this invocation, before she felt herself perfectly well, and rising in haste from her seat knelt down on the *priedieu*, then prostrated herself on the ground in prayer, and getting up without assistance, walked round the oratory, and lastly ran to the choir to make known to her sisters the miracle which God had worked in her through the saint's merits. They were filled with admiration and surprise on seeing her walk freely to and fro without any help, and praised God who is wonderful in His saints; and they returned together into choir to sing the Te Deum in thanksgiving before the image of the Blessed Catherine.

The two aforesaid miracles were cited in the General Congregation held before His Holiness on the 24th of March, 1744, and approved by him in a decree bearing date the 26th of May, 1744.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE CANONIZATION OF THE BLESSED

CATHERINE OF RICCI.

PROFESSED NUN IN THE VENERABLE MONASTERY OF SAINT VINCENT OF THE CITY OF PRATO, OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS.

When the commission for the resumption of the cause of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci was

signed, and the validity of the processes undertaken by apostolic authority recognized, this doubt was proposed in the antepreparatory congregatory on the 8th day of January, and the preparatory one, held on the 19th of November, 1743—*Whether the miracles, and which of them, worked since the permission to venerate the Blessed Catherine was given, are sufficient in the case and for the purpose in question.*—The same doubt was again proposed in the General Congregation held before His Holiness on the 24th day of March of the current year. Among the miracles which were there cited and discussed, the two which were received with the greatest applause were the cure of Maria Clemenza Staccioli, a Florentine, and of Sister Mary Magdalen Fabri, a nun of the Order of Preachers of St. Catherine's monastery in the city of Augusta. The former was delivered by the intercession of St. Catherine, to whom she commended herself with great fervour and devotion, from a cancer abounding with worms; having first seven, latterly two mouths or cavities, which tormented her right breast for eight years, and at last brought her to the point of death, so that it was considered fit to fortify her with the Sacred Viaticum. The latter had been ill for three years, and afflicted by a severe arthritic disease, which had its seat in her knees and thighs; she had left off the use of medicine, which was of no avail, and was shortly rendered unable to move. She was carried in the arms of the other nuns to the smaller choir of the church on the day when the hymn Te Deum

Laudamus was sung in thanksgiving for the beatification of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci; her disease and sufferings increased, but when she commended herself, with all the devotion of which she was capable, to the Blessed Catherine, she was not only suddenly freed from pain, but finding herself able to kneel, she genuflected immediately, and at once began to walk about the monastery, having recovered all the strength that she had before she was first attacked by the illness.

Therefore, our most holy Lord, having received the suffrages of the consultors and heard the desires of the cardinals, did not decree anything in the General Congregation held on the aforesaid 24th day of March, but postponed his decision till he had time to implore God's light and help. When he had performed this, some time after, on the same day that he had offered the holy sacrifice in the interior chapel of the church of Santa Maria de Vallicella, on the altar under which the body of St. Philip Neri reposes, he summoned the Rev. Father, the Promoter of the Faith, and me the undersigned secretary of the Sacred Rites, and stated that, having undertaken the continuation and promotion of the cause, and having examined it a second time in private after the General Congregation, he had some difficulty in approving the second of the above-mentioned miracles; and he went on to inform us that he doubted whether the miracle in question could be truly said to have taken place after the permission of the

veneration, as it happened on the 9th day of November, 1732, which was fourteen or fifteen days before the solemn beatification, performed in the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, on the 23rd day of November of the same year; but, nevertheless, he had at length come round to the opinion that it had truly taken place after the permission to venerate, for though the Brief was not yet published, nor the solemnity of the beatification enacted in the Vatican Basilica, the Sacred Congregation of Rites had decreed that the beatification could be safely proceeded with and the Brief of beatification had been signed on the 1st day of October by the hand of Clement XII. his predecessor; and moreover, because it had been so decided in the cause of Saint John of the Cross, as related by His Holiness in his work on the *Canonization of Saints*, Book II. chap. xxi., num. 11.

Having disposed of this difficulty, the same most holy Lord further stated that he had hesitated to approve the same miracle, although he allowed that the instantaneous cure, together with the recovery of health, had been amply proved, because he did not think that it was proved in the same way that she had persevered in health, that she had no other disease, and that she had not merely changed from one disease to another; and he said, that in order to clear up this difficulty he had taken particular pains to discover the truth, as was done in a similar case by Clement XI. of holy memory, as we read in the above quoted work of His Holiness on the

Canonization of Saints, Book III. cap. v. num. 14; namely, by sending to the bishop of Augusta, and giving him instructions to take proper means for the discovery of the truth, and added, that he had learnt what he wished from the replies which had been transmitted to him, namely, that the nun still lived, that she still enjoyed perfect health, and since her miraculous cure had never suffered from any disease, except, after the lapse of four years, a slight pain in the reins, which only annoyed her a short time; the witnesses to this being the physician of the monastery and all the nuns. These facts had been gathered by His Holiness from the answers faithfully given to the heads of his instructions, which were returned to him by an ecclesiastic well known to His Holiness, deputed for this purpose by the bishop of Augusta.

He concluded by asserting that the difficulties having been removed, he wished to delay no longer, and had selected this day, dedicated to St. Philip Neri, in consideration of the spiritual and intimate friendship which existed between this saint and the Blessed Catherine of Ricci during his lifetime, as the following words of the Bull of his canonization witness: Cum in Urbe maneret tunc in humanis agentem Catharinam Ricciam sub regula S. Augustini Monialem Prati in Hetruria commorantem longo temporis spatio est allocutus. Thus on this day he declared that "*The miracles before us, both of the first and second, as well as of the second and third class, are sufficient in the case and for the purpose in question,*

i. e., of Canonization. And so His Holiness decreed, and commanded that the decree should be published. This day the 26th of May, 1744.

C. CARDINAL DE MARINIS, Prefect.

Loco ✠ Sigilli.

T. PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM,
Secretary.

Finally, this doubt having been proposed in the General Congregation of Rites before the same Sovereign Pontiff, on the 22nd of September, 1744:—*Whether, after these two miracles have been approved, it is safe to proceed to the Canonization of the Blessed Catherine;* and having received an affirmative answer from the Sacred Congregation; our holy Lord, after mature consideration, commanded on the 6th of October, of the same year, that the following decree for the solemn canonization of the Blessed Catherine should be issued and published.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE CANONIZATION OF THE BLESSED

CATHERINE OF RICCI,

PROFESSED NUN OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS, IN THE VENERABLE MONASTERY OF ST. VINCENT'S, IN THE CITY OF PRATO.

In the General Congregation of Rites, held before our most holy Lord, Benedict XIV., on the 24th day of March, of the current year, the cause of the canonization of the Blessed Cathe-

rine of Ricci was brought forward by the most reverend Cardinal Lercari "super dubio:" *Whether the miracles, and which of them, will be sufficient in the case and for the purpose in question.* His Holiness approved two out of the three miracles, which were there cited and examined, having happened after the formal beatification of the Blessed Catherine, as is shown by the decree published on the 26th day of May, of the current year. Subsequently, on the 22nd day of the past month of September, a General Congregation of Rites was again assembled in the presence of our most holy Lord; the last doubt which remained to be investigated was proposed by Cardinal Lercari: *Whether, after these two miracles having been approved, it is safe to proceed to the Canonization of the Blessed Catherine;* and all the members of the Congregation, who had the power of voting, answered in the affirmative. His Holiness deferred giving the solution of the doubt until his own prayers, and those of others, had sought for light from the Father of lights, to assist him in such a grave deliberation; which, having done with great fervour in the ensuing days, on the undermentioned day, sacred to St. Bruno, Founder of the Carthusians, after he had celebrated mass in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, he summoned before him the Rev. Father Ludovico de Valenti, Promoter of the Faith, and me, the undersigned Secretary of the Congregation of Rites, and in order to add a new honour to the Order of Preachers, he commanded in person that a decree

of the canonization of the aforesaid Blessed Catherine of Ricci should be issued and promulgated, whensoever it should take place. This day, 6th of October, 1744.

S. CARDINAL VALENTI.

Loco ✠ Sigilli.

T. PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM,
Secretary.

A CANTICLE

OF PASSAGES FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, IN HONOUR OF THE PASSION OF CHRIST OUR LORD, REVEALED TO THE BLESSED CATHERINE OF RICCI BY THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD.*

Amici mei et proximi mei adversum me appropinquaverunt et steterunt.

Traditus sum et non egrediebar, oculi mei languerunt præ inopia.

Et factus est sudor meus, sicut guttæ sanguinis decurrentis in terram.

Circumdederunt me canes multi, consilium malignantium obsedit me.

Corpus meum dedi percutientibus; et genas meas vellentibus.

Faciem meam non averti ab increpantibus, et conspecuentibus in me.

Quoniam ego in flagella paratus sum, et dolor meus in conspectu meo semper.

* Vid. Chap. ii.

Milites plectentes coronam de spinis imposuerunt eam super caput meum.

Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos, dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea.

Et dederunt me in escam meam fel; et in siti mea potaverunt me aceto.

Omnes videntes me deriserunt me, locuti sunt labiis, et moverunt caput.

Ipsi vero consideraverunt et inspexerunt me, diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea, et super vestem meam miserunt sortem.

In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, Redemisti me Domine Deus veritatis.

Memento famulorum tuorum Domine dum veneris in regnum tuum.

Jesus autem emissa voce magna tradit spiritum.

Misericordias Domine in eternum cantabo.

Vere languores nostros ipse tulit et dolores nostros ipse portavit.

Ipse vulneratus est proter iniquitates nostras, attritus est propter scelera nostra.

Omnes nos quasi oves erravimus, unusquisque in viam suam declinavit.

Et posuit in eo Dominus iniquitates omnium nostrorum.

Exurge quare obdormis Domine, exurge, et ne repellas in finem.

Ecce Deus salvator meus, fiducialiter agam, et non timebo.

Te ergo quæsumus Domine Jesu famulis tuis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.

V. Miserere notri Jesu benigne.

℟. Qui passus es clementer pro nobis.

OREMUS.

Respice quæsumus Domine super hanc familiam tuam, pro qua Dominus noster Jesus Christus non dubitavit manibus tradi nocentium et crucis subire tormentum. Per eumdem, &c.

THE HISTORY

OF

ST. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO.

THE HISTORY

OF

ST. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO.

PART I.

SECTION I.

1. Preface.—2. Birth of Agnes.—3. Her education and youthful fervour.—4. Origin, fortunes, and condition of Montepulciano.—5. Her parents permit her to retire from the world.—6. Her reception in the monastery of del Sacco.—7. Her noble and virtuous disposition.—8. Her miraculous rapture.—9. Her piety.—10. Our B. Lady appears to her.—11. Increase of Agnes' fervour.

1. That matured system which can persuade a man to renounce himself, and to sacrifice, to the cultivation of his own soul, the greater part of those sweet ties which bind him to society, presupposes a long series of religious ideas, and an advanced state of enlightenment. However great its advantages, it is invariably a painful sacrifice to a feeling heart, to withdraw itself from the intercourse of others, as if from dangerous companions, provided that it be not done out of an unnatural antipathy to our fellow creatures,

or an aversion arising from satiety of pleasure. In order that the sacrifice should be laudable and meritorious, it must be made with a lofty end, and matured by the thought, that after having fled with magnanimity from human companionship, solitude may become to us a school in which, by contemplating the Supreme Being, we may ever find a fresh reason for loving Him, and making ourselves worthy of Him, and then, filled with His love, we may remember that we left many of our fellow creatures, whom God has obliged us to love, in the midst of the turmoil of the world. Thus, that solitude which divides us from men that we may go in search of heavenly wisdom, recalls us to them in order that we may procure their real good by the most efficacious means. In all ages the Church has honoured a life separated from the world, while the people have regarded it with mingled veneration and aversion. The promiscuous multitude of those who devoted themselves to this manner of life, introduced of necessity some absurdity, originating in the influence of the climate, or in national prejudices; but if the veil has been lifted from off some affectation of austerity, or of mystery by more enlightened times, the homage which is due to those Christians who pledge themselves to follow out the evangelical counsels is undiminished or rather increased.

Hence arose the greatness of our saint in the eyes of the pious; and we shall find her great in the midst of all her cares and all her projects, ever intent upon solitude, and averse to figuring in the

world. The character of virtue is always the same, and is of so delicate a nature, that it cannot permit its rays to partake of that conspicuous lustre which surrounds human enterprises. It is a miracle of grace; it lives in neglect, while silence is the only witness of its triumphs; and the more it finds itself forgotten by the world the better it learns to despise, without insulting, its folly; but it knows how to wait, until the world, wearied, and at length undeceived, turns to the praises of the Author of all sanctity.

2. Yet, although virtue shrinks from appearing before the eyes of men, and although its only happiness is to rejoice in the contemplation of the Sovereign Good, the brightness which emanates from it cannot long be concealed.

How could a virgin, whose whole conduct breathed unspeakable purity, fervour, and holiness—a virgin to whom not a single passion obtained access—a virgin over whom were poured the most attractive sweetnesses of divine mercy—a virgin like Agnes, whose principal actions we have undertaken to describe, ever prevent that veneration being entertained for her, which even in the world is only conciliated by long-tried goodness?

The heavenly presages, which were remarked before her birth, influenced the wise conjectures which were made from that period upon the glory of her destiny. An unvarying tradition, which rests upon respectable monuments, assures us that when Agnes's mother was overtaken by the pains of childbirth, a number of burning torches of extra-

ordinary brilliancy appeared round her bed, and this singular phenomenon, which cannot be attributed to any atmospheric or natural cause, lasted until the moment of Agnes's birth. Her native town was a village in the neighbourhood of Montepulciano, called Graciano Vecchio, and the year in which she was born, 1268. It is difficult to understand why the historians of that period should have neglected to inform us the precise month and day, and have passed over in silence an epoch which they themselves tell us was distinguished for remarkable prodigies. We only know that her father's name was Laurence de Segni ; her family was rich and prosperous, and in process of time became one of the noble families of Montepulciano, but is now extinct. Her parents, however, were most conspicuous for their exemplary lives and tenderness towards the poor, and God rewarded them with this holy daughter.

3. When she was born, Clement IV. sat in the chair of St. Peter, and dying on the first of December of the same year, was succeeded by Gregory X. That age of strife, and of political revolutions, in which both the priesthood and the empire passed through more than one severe crisis, was fortunate in beholding many eminent geniuses together, who made up for the rudeness of the thirteenth century. The bishop of Arezzo, who was also the pastor of the church of Montepulciano, had the happiness of seeing in Agnes a mind of unusual strength, and worthy of a place among the great men of her time.

The youth of this innocent child would not have arrested the historian's attention unless it had been decorated by traits which justified the highest expectations of her goodness. It seemed her privilege to be exempt, even from those weaknesses which are common to the moments of the development of nature. Her composed and candid disposition was an excellent ground to receive the first seeds of virtue, accompanied by an infusion of grace, which prevented them from being stifled or suppressed in any degree by the lively imagination, or the playful and innocent disposition of childhood. Her father's household presented none but edifying models. Before she seemed old enough to be instructed how to pray, she had made great progress in that science, which is one of the most necessary communications between God and His creatures. She repeated the Lord's Prayer assiduously, and while her lips pronounced it, her appearance gave clear proofs of an unspeakable interior joy, caused without doubt by that most sweet unction and calm which the thought of her Divine Creator brought to her soul.

It was these secret attractions which led her to hurry at certain hours of the day to a corner of her father's garden, where, secluded from the eyes of all, she offered all her affection to the Most High, as a protestation of gratitude and love. Already convinced of the emptiness and the danger of worldly dissipation, her inclinations unconsciously led her to seek for a life of solitude ; and some internal lights never allowed her

to doubt that this was her vocation. A sweet impatience made her reprove herself for her involuntary delays, and she almost wished to anticipate the call of God to separate herself from the world. The first fruits of her youth appeared to her a most precious part of the offering she intended to make to God. She anxiously sought to ascertain the will of her parents in this respect, but their refusals, dictated by prudence or by unwillingness to lose such a daughter, did not destroy her confidence that God would open a way for her to follow the calls of Heaven. There was no sacred community of virgins near the spot where she was born, where she might make arrangements to be admitted, as soon as she had overcome the reluctance of those whose authority she ever respected, so she earnestly wished either to go frequently into the city, or to live there, in order facilitate her resolutions.

4. But the turbulent state of Montepulciano, rather than the wish to turn away their daughter's mind from her design, prevented her parents from thinking of removing their habitation to the town. The fire of discord and the ardent spirit of national strife, had been kindled in Montepulciano, which acted like principles of destruction in the policy of the smaller states into which Italy was divided. We will cast a rapid glance over the Annals of Montepulciano, for they deserve some space in the history of a saint, by whom their glory was so greatly increased.

The continual discoveries of many remnants

of antiquity, referring to the religion, the manners, and the arts of the Etruscans, induce us to believe that the city and its territory were, during many ages of the Roman Republic, and of the Etruscan kingdom, the abode of a numerous and thriving population. The enlightened visitor regards the Museo Bucalliano as an invaluable archive, and beholds in it the relics of a nation which no longer exists. These remains inspire him with a lofty idea of the origin of the Poliziani, which, in spite of all investigations, remains lost in the darkness of ages. If we consider the new inhabitants of Chiusi, mentioned by Pliny as the ancestors of the Poliziani, which appears most probable, we know that by the influence of Laartes Porsenna, Lucomo of Chiusi, or by some unknown misfortune, a portion of the inhabitants of that city was induced to retire to this hill, the most delicious in the neighbourhood. In the course of time the new site changed its name of Monte Mercurio to that of Monte Poliziano, perhaps in the 350th year of the Christian era, when it was enlarged and embellished by the Tribune Zanobius of Landericus. But neither changes nor years could destroy the lasting tradition among the Poliziani that they came from Chiusi, and they employed the celebrated sculptor Andrea Sansovino to make a marble bust of King Porsenna, whom they regard as their founder. We will not, however, pursue our researches into this matter, lest we fall into the vanity which seeks for itself a noble origin in the uncertain shadows of ages.

The remaining records of the year 770 make a distinct and honourable mention of Montepulciano, and name the illustrious men who came from thence; among others Gualterotto Bernardino who fought with extraordinary courage under Boniface, Count of Corsica, against the Saracens of Africa. The family of Gualterotto became extinct in a woman of the race of Contucci.

Until the year 1110 the Poliziani enjoyed full and entire civil liberty and uninterrupted peace, but from that period they were victims to disasters caused by rivalries and wars. The inhabitants of Sienna, who wished to annex them to their dominions, attacked them at three different periods, but with the assistance of the people of Orvieto and Perugia, and the Florentine Republic, then in alliance with the Pisans, they succeeded in maintaining their independence, which was secured by the mediation of the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa in the differences between the Republics of Florence and Sienna, for one of the articles of the peace contained the liberty of the Poliziani.

In 1176 that calm which they hoped would last far longer was overshadowed. A Diet of all the Republics of Tuscany held in San Quirico the following year only relieved Montepulciano from its dangerous disturbances after much deliberation. Hugo Vinceguerra, the Sindaco of the Florentines on one hand, and Bartolommeo Rinaldini, who held the same office among the Siennese on the other, opposed each other with great warmth, the former maintaining that Montepulciano should be left in the enjoyment of its

ancient rights of liberty, which should be guaranteed by all the Tuscan Republics, while the latter declared that the rights of his own Republic over Montepulciano were inalienable. The battles which followed, and the long uncertainty of their success at last wearied the Siennese, who promised to allow what they had so obstinately refused to agree to in San Quirico.

But the internal dissensions of Montepulciano, sown there by Pepo di Jacopo and Gulfo Brandoli, soon furnished the Republic of Sienna with a pretext for renewing their attacks upon it and taking advantage of them.

In 1223 and 1228 the malcontents went over to Sienna and plotted the ruin of their native town. This raging discord was the cause of slaughter on all sides, to which the Florentines were not indifferent, and their soldiers were soon engaged in fierce warfare with the Siennese. There were nothing but difficulties in the way of peace and quiet, for each party inflicted severe injuries on the other, without any other result than the enfeebling of both. The interposition of Piccardo dell' Isola, the emperor's vicegerent in San Quirico, of Gerard of Arnasthein, imperial legate for Tuscany, and of the deputies sent for the express purpose by the Romans to Sienna and Florence, produced no effect upon parties mutually enraged, and become familiar with slaughter and blood. The Siennese, who had then the forces of Perugia at their disposal, threatened to make Florence pay dear for the

protection which she had with trouble and cost afforded the Poliziani.

In the heat of these struggles a strict order was received by the cities of Tuscany from the Emperor Frederic, who was just reconciled with the Pope, commanding them to lay aside their arms, and to come to a perfect understanding. The Florentines, as well as their allies the Poliziani, received it with contempt and indifference, but the Pope, who had the glory of suggesting this just and humane measure to the emperor, and wished for its success, sent his nuncio Gattifredo de' Cesari into Tuscany furnished with most important instructions. He assembled several congresses, but finding his personal instructions useless, had recourse to the ecclesiastical censure, which deprives an entire body politic of the celebration of religious rites. The war notwithstanding continued, and in the year 1232, after many changes of fortune, truces, defeats, and victories, the Siennese turned all their efforts against Montepulciano, which, on the eve of an assault, either made an honourable capitulation, according to Manenti, or yielded to an attack of the enemy, according to Villani. The fall of Montepulciano wounded the minds of the Florentines deeply, and they prepared to revenge themselves by a campaign against Sienna. The hostilities became most sanguinary, and were only ended by the interposition of the Pope Gregory IX., who sent Cardinal Jacopo Conti as his representative. The treaty of peace restored their liberty to the Poliziani, together with the castles

of Vagliana, Castellare, Laviano, Casal di Tolle Sarteano, Chianciano, Panicale, Gucciano, and the Badia Spineta; and from thence to 1253 they enjoyed the happy fruits of peace and prosperity.

The calm was at length disturbed by Ungeri da Bagnolo, general of the troops of Sienna, who threw himself on to the Poliziano territory to devastate it; but the energetic remonstrances of the Florentines checked this disturbance. However, their inveterate quarrels with Sienna, which began so long ago about Montepulciano, and were accompanied by wars, and by the secret practices of many turbulent spirits, gave too much reason to dread new disturbances and troubles. In effect when the affairs of the Florentines were on the decline, in consequence of their great defeat by the Siennese at Monte Aperti on the Arbia, on the 4th of September, Montepulciano was forced, in spite of her steady neutrality, to submit to the conquering arms of Sienna.

Although he was on the side of Sienna, the virtue, courage, and consummate experience of Messer Manente called Farinata degli Uberti, saved Florence from destruction, which had been resolved on in a congress held at Empoli, chiefly composed of Siennese of the Ghibelline faction. But Florence was no longer able to protect Montepulciano, although she had promised to do so to Count Giordano, lieutenant of Manfredi, king of Sicily, and the Poliziani submitted unconditionally to the Republic of Sienna, which

sent Provenzano Salimbeni with the authority of first magistrate, and ordered him to erect there a fortress, to ensure the possession of their conquest. Many of the conquered Guelphs voluntarily exiled themselves from their country, perhaps with the hope of finding some means of breaking their chains. In the month of June, at the end of six years, they surprised the fortress, and made themselves masters of it without much resistance. This proceeding would have called forth a tremendous vengeance from the Siennese, but the pacific projects of the Pope, Alexander IV., and the manœuvres of king Charles of Anjou, imperial vicegerent in Tuscany, furnished them with abundant employment, suitable to their views. Although the most resolute of the Poliziani opposed king Charles with arms in their hands, he prevailed entirely, and not only the Guelphs who had entered by a surprise, but also the Ghibellines, who were of the party opposed to his, were forced to evacuate the fortress. Montepulciano was obliged to swear a complete obedience to Sienna, was forbidden to hold any intercourse with the Ghibellines, and the laws and statutes of Sienna were put in force by the authority of a judge and four citizens sent from thence. The fire was thus apparently extinguished, but it is easy to imagine that melancholy traces of it still remained, which kept alive the fear of new agitations.

Such was the state of our city, as we are emboldened to call it by the example of the ancient historians, who, in speaking of other countries,

gave the name of cities to places which could not claim all the qualifications of a city; such, I repeat, was the state of Montepulciano at the time of the birth of Agnes. Her history has been traced up to the age of nine years. A virtuous restlessness disturbed her mind on the subject of her vocation, which was too decided to require further proofs. It seemed to her a culpable resistance to the law of God to delay putting it in execution, for the laws both of faith and reason taught her the importance of this point. "If the choice of a state of life," she frequently said to herself, "depends upon God's will, how anxious I ought to be to find, and to enter that state which has been allotted to me from all eternity in His inscrutable counsels. God has decreed to lead me to salvation by one only way among the many. Although His merciful will has prepared many ways for the consummation of His elect, He has pointed out but one, to mistake which would be fatal. Besides, the sacrifice which God requires from me is another proof of His infinite goodness, which leads me to desire to make it. When He speaks to my heart about the fulfilment of His will, He shows that He wishes to save me. I will adore Him for ever and wait in the hope of my Lord, till He has given me the means of executing His inspirations."

This simple and innocent child, divided between her sweet impatience to consecrate herself to God, and her fear of showing too much resistance to her parents' wishes, waited until her victory

became more admirable from having been longer disputed. Much time did not pass, however, before those who had opposed her most strongly, were drawn by an internal inspiration to consent to all her projects; and the joy and consolation of Agnes, who at length found herself free, and of her parents, who knew that their offering was well pleasing to God, were mutual. The old accounts report that it was the following circumstance which led her parents to give their unexpected consent to her desires. Our holy virgin was one day going to Montepulciano, in company with some women, when, as they approached the gate of the city called Gracciano, she was suddenly attacked by a large flight of crows, who came from a neighbouring hill, on which stood a house of prostitution. It is said that she had great difficulty in freeing herself from the beaks and claws of these birds, so unnaturally furious; and it is believed that the malignant spirits, foreseeing that Agnes would in time expel them from that place of infamy, employed those crows, as fitting instruments to make war upon her; and finally, that Agnes herself put forward this event before the eyes of her parents as a means of overcoming their reluctance to allow her to leave the world.

Using the rational historians' right of freedom of judgment, I will here state that I cannot find the slightest connexion between the anecdote of the crows, and the love of the parents, who laid aside their own objections. It is true that the Divine Wisdom which rules over every circum-

stance and change of circumstances, can make use of the most ordinary things, by putting them to extraordinary uses, to penetrate the hearts of men; but this principle must be kept within its just application, otherwise everything in nature might be viewed by visionary minds as an absurd manifestation of the adorable and inscrutable counsels of Heaven. This mode of thinking would lead us at one step into the most deplorable fanaticism; for men became a prey to superstition as soon as they indulged too abstracted ideas, and dreamt at all hours of the marvellous and the supernatural. They thus precipitated themselves into the mad deliriums of enthusiasm, and with an excess of folly despised those who reasoned with the lights of sound theology. Theology, indeed, shows us the hand of Providence in every event which happens to man, but it teaches him at the same time to humble himself, and to be silent about the unsearchable ways of the Most High.

Let the aforesaid circumstance be considered at the reader's pleasure; we cannot, however, admit it, without presupposing that the spirits who entered the crows had a foreknowledge, which was too far removed from their conjectures, and without allowing that Agnes herself learnt the reason of their wrath, by a work which she did not know that she would perform in after times. The native simplicity of this history is destroyed by a similar complication of circumstances, whereas it is more reasonable and probable to say that it was the secret voice of God, which called

Agnes to an eminent state of religious perfection, which suddenly moved and changed the hearts of her parents.

As soon as the pious girl had received her father's approval, she went without delay to a house in Montepulciano, inhabited by a society of women consecrated to God, and vulgarly called Del Sacco, on account of the roughness of the clothes they wore, as a sign of having renounced all earthly pomp. She was here received with joy, and here she buried herself in the death of Jesus Christ, to live anew in His life alone. In a place where the fruits of virtue were only an ordinary spectacle, the new proselyte made herself a subject of special admiration. Although fasting and prayer, silence and meditation, are most likely to strike the eye of the multitude, these were grounded in her upon more essential virtues, from which they derive a brighter lustre. At that early age she possessed the steadiness of principle, and the constant tenor of life, which are in general the results of long training and of advanced virtue. Grace, which had chosen her, prevented her with its ineffable blessings, and crowned her in the beginning of her course with the glorious fruits which properly belong to more mature years. Agnes saw everything around her, so to speak, with the eyes of humility, of that wise and enlightened humility which cannot be confounded with cold and unreflecting indolence; and which can penetrate the depths of its own frailty, without losing the knowledge of, and gratitude for the gifts it has received. These sentiments animated

all her daily exercises. Believing herself the weakest and the most imperfect of all in the performance of her religious duties, and thinking on the other hand, that the special graces which she received from God, bound her particularly to profit by them, she continually incited herself to purify her own heart, and to make it more fit to receive light from heaven.

At this period a religious woman of singular prudence, came by command of the Bishop of Arezzo, to make the accustomed visitation of the monastery, and determined to investigate the truth of what she heard concerning the spirit and the virtue of Agnes. She found that her merits were far greater than the praises which were made of them, and she could not forbear congratulating Agnes, and predicting a still happier progress. Seeing, however, that her words pained the humble novice, she drew her mistress aside, and said with an irresistible air of confidence, "I can assure you with certainty, that this girl will reach a high degree of perfection, and rival the glories of the other Agnes, who has illustrated the Church with the double triumph of virginity and martyrdom."

These words increased Sister Margaret's (for that was the name of the mistress) care and anxiety in the cultivation of such a precious and hopeful plant; but, however much she increased her vigilance, she always found to her joy, that the fervent efforts of Agnes anticipated her. It is difficult to give a precise account of her daily conduct, which exhibited a perfect model of virtue;

let it suffice to say that her companions wondered how she could persevere in the greatest trials of voluntary mortification, and how she could live so detached from all objects of sense, and from the inclinations of nature.

As she showed herself full of an affectionate desire to assist her fellow-religious in any way, the prioress gave her the charge of the dispensary. The trouble and fatigue of managing this office, so that all might be satisfied, were but slight trials of her charity. The love of our neighbour has a brilliant character. It directs the necessary intercourse with holiness, because it teaches us to love our neighbour for God's sake, who is our common father; it partakes of the greatness of justice, for in the act of loving, it seeks to value the true God alone, and it is clothed with an intrinsic candour, which is identical with truth, because, according to the precept, our love of others ought to be the same as our love of ourselves. The appearance of virtuous love always bears the mark of these qualities, and it is easy to see how Agnes, who was well instructed in this school, invariably showed, that whatever her outward employment might be, her moving principle was charity, so that no service seemed hard or wearisome to her. Occasions were not of course wanting in which a person of less virtue than hers might have had disturbed moments, but Agnes's charity was too well grounded to suffer the smallest relaxation of vigour.

She soon discovered the manner of preserving the most complete recollection, peace, and con-

tentment during every exterior employment. She knew how to find time enough to familiarize herself with prayer, and to rekindle the ardour of her soul. Henceforward, God was pleased to show her more ostensibly how pleasing her assiduity in prayer was to Him, by outward signs of His favour. He makes the soul that He loves His temple, and loads it with inestimable riches, but these are only known to the spirit which is enriched by them. If God wishes to glorify Himself by presenting some image of His bounty, He must make some sensible manifestation of power, in order to convince mortal minds that the soul of the just is a mine of most admirable treasures. In these cases He gives full play to the energy of His love, and the process which goes on in the loving soul extends itself to the body in a corresponding manner, which we are not able to explain, but which we cannot doubt. We have an instance in the life of Agnes, recorded by a pen, which the learned universally allow to have been guided by truth, sound criticism, and excellent doctrine. One day, when our saint was in prayer, with her eyes fixed upon an image of our crucified Saviour, which was placed high on the wall, such was the violence of the transports of love that prompted her to draw near to that divine effigy, that she could hardly distinguish the desire from the act. She was suddenly raised by an unknown power as high as the image, where she was able, suspended in air, to express her immense affection, and after embracing it with tears, she placidly descended to the ground. A rapture is distinguished by certain

signs which raise it above a simple ecstasy, which is that separation from the senses, during which the spirit seems to interrupt its accustomed relations with the body. A divine power is the instrument of both, which removes every danger of an illusion. In the former, however, the reasonable will itself is inclined, by an amiable and extraordinary violence which accompanies a rapture, to follow the flights of the intellect, that grasps some supernatural and attractive object. When this violence has, with surprising regularity, taken possession of the entire physical frame, this latter acquires an impetus, a rapidity, and facility of motion, which breaks through the laws of nature, by the assistance of a superior power. Although the senses prevent us from forming an adequate idea of these things, they are thoroughly convinced of their reality, when it happens, as it did to Agnes, that they become the instruments of a soul which shakes off its bonds and its burdens, and raises itself towards God with the love and the force of all its affections.

Tokens like these, of mercy and partiality, by which Heaven was pleased to mark her out and to animate her feet to run the paths of perfection, were frequently conferred on Agnes, even in her earliest years. A series of sweetnesses were the foundations of that magnificent design of the works she was in future to perform for the glory of her beneficent Lord. When we examine the Holy Scriptures, which are the history of the dealings of God's providence with men, we find the same diversity in the events by which God prepares

even the holiest souls which He has chosen from all eternity, showing Himself as a God of tenderness to some, in order to allure them to His great ends, and trying others with terrible and rigorous proofs, in order to accustom them to enterprises of peril and fatigue. Both these means are embraced with the same joy by the soul which loves God, and desires to love Him with the same constancy amidst pains and misfortunes, amidst pleasures and joys. Neither of these means of corresponding with the intentions of Heaven, were wanting to Agnes; and we will regard her for the present absorbed in the joy which arises from feeling in our own person the benign influence of Heaven. In order to make it still more propitious, she used every effort to be devout towards her who reigns there as Queen, for she is the Mother of God. Her anxiety to obtain our Lady's protection, made her adopt most ingenious and unusual devotions to her. Although Jesus Christ the Mediator, is the one end and object of Christian worship, for He is the only fountain of hope and grace, of merit and of reward, still the intercession of the saints, and especially of our Lady, is most useful in the necessities of our earthly pilgrimage. As St. Augustine teaches, the homage we render to the saints is an homage of fellowship. We honour them as chosen members of that Church to which we also belong, and the honour we pay them refers principally to Jesus Christ, the sovereign and head of that body in which we are united with the saints. God wishes to save His elect, but not separately; He desires

to save them, inasmuch as they belong to one society, which is the Church. This body, by means of its prayers, and the charity which animates it, helps each of its members; which made St. Augustine say, that the Church brings forth all the Christians. But as the Church comprehends all the elect in glory, and the saints who are yet in this life, every Christian depends on both these, for he depends on the whole body, so long as he is not cut off from it by that terrible separation, which is the greatest punishment the Church can inflict. This bond of union shows the efficacy of the saints' intercession. Jesus Christ Himself, to whom all our gratitude is due, being the Head, it follows that we should honour His chosen members, provided that the honour we pay to creatures who are dear in the sight of God, is exempt in every way from certain complicated practices, foreign to the spirit of the Church, which only inculcate superficial piety, and seem little likely to awaken a true love of Jesus Christ in the souls of the faithful, or to lead them to imitate the saints' lives in sincerity.

The piety of Agnes was abundantly enlightened, and acted with that correctness of ideas which is most consonant to the sublime character of true love of God, so that there was nothing about her which did not tend to increase this love. Her daily exercise of tender devotion to the angels and saints, and especially, as has been said, to the Mother of God, were prompted by her desire of inviting all creatures to love God, and her anxiety to obtain the assistance of those

who love Him in heaven with a love that is rendered divine by their perfect beatitude.

The Blessed Mother of God rewarded her with sensible signs of her protection. She appeared to her one day surrounded by glory and brightness, comforted her in the most benignant manner, and giving her three small stones of extraordinary beauty, went away leaving her overflowing with joy. The meaning of the gift was revealed to Agnes at the same time, which was, that she should in future build a church in honour of the most holy Mary, and lay these three stones in the foundations of it, while she placed the happy progress of the sacred edifice under the auspices of the Three Divine Persons, who were indicated by the number of the stones. We shall see in process of time how the whole was fulfilled.

There are many parts of this fact which may perhaps be received ambiguously by those who, in their eagerness to explore and unravel the prodigies of heaven with mere ordinary light, seem to forget that man is ignorant of even the origin of those laws which influence the reflecting spirit within ourselves. We have related this fact, as we found it in the old histories, with lucid and concordant simplicity, nor have we perceived in relating it any of that want of reality which pains and offends. The truth of the vision remains the same whether it was a vivid impression on the senses, or the keen imagination of the intellect, enabled by the power of divine love to see great things, because a vivid impression on the intellect, which has the marks of reality,

is a sufficient proof that the mind perceives and distinguishes the object represented. As to the symbolical meaning of the three stones, there is nothing in it incongruous to the character of the donor who predicted the future event. The sacred doctors frequently use a threefold number of substances to signify the Persons of the ineffable Trinity. Is it absurd or unreal that the Queen of angels should exhort Agnes to construct a temple, and insinuate that she was to begin the building with a sign which refers by the number of its parts to the greatest mystery of the Godhead? We may therefore say with reason, in spite of all sophisms, that this favour of heaven animated Agnes' steps, to walk still more swiftly in the path of virtues.

Although she entertained no doubt of the vision and the prophecy, which was revealed to her by an interior light, she was uncertain of the place and of the way she should choose to begin the future temple; but this uncertainty could not shake her confidence, and was soon forgotten in the readiness with which she replaced herself, if we may so express it, in the arms of God. Her favourite portion was to serve Him according to His Will. She only considered herself as an instrument, which would have been strangely misapplied if used for any other purpose but the service of her supreme Lord. Hence, her commonest actions were ennobled by her sole aim, which was to fulfil the will of God. Probably her ardent desire of serving God with the greatest fitness afflicted her not a little, as it discovered

to her her own insufficiency. She well knew what a difficulty, and what an obstacle to perfection it is after the loss of innocence to live in a body that is continually exposed to the shocks of passions hostile to the laws of the spirit, and she neglected no means to guard herself against it. The voice of obedience alone could moderate the severity of the voluntary macerations which she made a rule of inflicting on her limbs. Whenever she purified her heart, she always found a fresh reason for regarding her body as an enemy, only fit to be brought into subjection, according to the expression of St. Paul. It is certain, however, that in giving a glance at her past years, she found nothing which could give her a sufficient motive for self-reproach, for her life was one course of innocence and purity. We are not asserting that she was free from the incitements of passions, which are contrary to virtue; such praise we will leave to those writers who, without examining the nature of such a rare privilege, have thought fit to apply it to those holy men whose deeds they relate, and they attribute it to them with an openness that is surprising, because it is destitute of proof. Agnes found by experience that she was liable to passions, but this knowledge had the happy result of making her combat them, while the victory she gained over them before she well knew what they were, increased her glory. Still, the knowledge that we live, as it were, in a circle of enemies who harass us at every step, or at least lay dangerous ambushes for us, is always a great

pain to a soul that aspires to perfection. Our saint watched continually over herself, refrained her desires, and even her inclination to rigorous penitence, under the guidance of the most sublime light, which was infused into her by heaven. This light, which was always clear and vigorous, and brought perfect peace and encouraging hopes, increased tenfold whenever she approached the sacred mysteries. She did so very frequently, and used to call those days the days of joy and love. The world could not have brought to her in her narrow cell any object which would give her the smallest pleasure in comparison with that delight, without measure, which she there enjoyed; but this will not bear an historical description, and should only be admired in silence.

SECTION II.

Agnes goes to Proceno and founds a monastery there.—She is elected abbess.—Miraculous shower of manna.—Our saint's contemplative life.—She is favoured by a heavenly apparition.—An angel communicates her, and brings her some relics.—Some wonders are worked by Agnes' intercession.—The austerity of her life at Proceno.—The power of her prayers with God.—Her illness, and the events of it.—She is refreshed by a vision.—The spirit with which she governed the monastery.—Her union with God.—She goes for some time to Montepulciano, and returns to Proceno.

At length, after so many proofs of favour and love, Heaven sent Agnes a trial of her constancy. She was compelled by her duty to leave the monastery called Del Sacco, the place for which she had sighed, and where she had her first

satisfaction, namely, that of consecrating herself to God, which she justly regarded as a happy soil, whence she had learnt to gather the delicious fruits of the most sincere piety, a departure which could not fail to excite sensible sorrow and tenderness. The place where they first learnt to love is ever remembered with affection by feeling hearts, but however great Agnes' partiality for this monastery might be, her readiness in leaving it, at the command of her superiors, was equally great.

The inhabitants of Proceno, a small village situated in the district of Orvieto, being desirous of establishing a congregation of virgins dedicated to God's service among them, thought that the best means of effecting their design would be to send for one of the religious from Del Sacco, who should instruct the candidates in that manner of life which requires discreet guidance. They therefore, despatched some of the principal men of the place to the magistrate of Montepulciano himself. Their demand was considered just and suitable, and after consulting which sister should be sent, the views of all fell upon sister Margaret, mistress of the novices. She did not object to undertaking the charge, as she hoped with reason to be able thereby to promote the glory of God, but she protested at the same time, perhaps inspired from above, that she would not consent to depart unless she was permitted to take Agnes with her, and in order to carry out their decision the nuns were obliged to consent to this sacrifice. No sooner had Margaret and Agnes arrived at

Proceno than a good number of young women crowded round them, who had previously retired to a common dwelling, in order to attend to the cultivation of their piety. As their numbers increased daily, it was necessary to enlarge the former house, and it became a good-sized monastery. The most exact spirit of discipline was soon introduced, and made great progress. The attractiveness of Agnes' fervour and regularity became to the others as it were a polished looking-glass, in which they all saw the method of modelling their lives by the spirit of Christian perfection; and Sister Margaret saw with the utmost joy how advantageous her determination of taking her Agnes with her to Proceno had been.

Guided by this fortunate experience she formed greater designs for her. Knowing how much she was admired by the Procenese, she negotiated with them to make her superior of the newly formed monastery. The project was carefully concealed from Agnes alone, for fear she should raise the greatest obstacles. They considered seriously the best means of succeeding in this affair, and as Agnes was then only fifteen years old, Cardinal Federigo, at that time Bishop of Ostia, obtained a dispensation for her from the Sovereign Pontiff Martin II., commonly called Martin IV. The age now prescribed by the Canon Laws at which a religious woman may be made superioress, was then only fixed by some private synod, or some regulation generally observed. However that might be, it was well to obtain the oracular approbation of the common

Pastor of the Church for a choice which would seem too inconsiderate if weighed by the ordinary opinion that is held of a person only fifteen years old.

From the year in which Agnes was born, in which Clement IV. died, until the present year, 1283, the Chair of St. Peter had been occupied by Gregory X., Innocent V., Adrian V., John XX., and Nicholas III., who was succeeded by the above-mentioned Martin IV. When he was fully informed of the fame of singular piety which illustrated Agnes' name, he willingly consented to allow her to be placed at the head of a monastery, and blessed the dispositions of heaven in her election. The greatest difficulty that the sisters had in carrying out their project, was to find a way of preventing Agnes' great humility from disappointing the desires of all. In effect, she only listened to its voice, which was more powerful than all the entreaties of the Procenese, and the tears of her religious sisters, who earnestly begged her to take this ministry. The only thing which could change her determination was an authoritative command from Sister Margaret, whom she always held in the place of a mother; but it was with some repugnance, caused by the bad opinion she entertained of herself, that she obeyed, and at last undertook the charge they imposed upon her. When she was made the model of those whom she ardently loved as daughters in Jesus Christ, she became their consolation and their support. She bore in a certain sense the burdens of all, and all found by treading with

emulation in her footsteps, a path of security. An uninterrupted peace, a total estrangement from the dissipations of the world, a unanimous spirit of mutual charity, which was free from the weaknesses of their sex, prone to confound natural with virtuous affections, a sweet odour, in fine, of all virtues, reigned in that dwelling of which Agnes was the ornament and the joy. The Procenese were confirmed in the opinion that they had made an acquisition of inestimable value in the person of Agnes, and sought for an opportunity of showing their gratitude to the people of Montepulciano. This was the beginning of a mutual friendship, and led them to grant each other an exception from some taxes, namely, that the inhabitants of Montepulciano should be allowed a free passage over the bridge at Centeno, while those of Proceno were allowed the same privilege at the Vagliana bridge.

But we should not omit the approbation of Heaven, being incomparably greater than that of men, which manifested by portentous signs the worth of Agnes in the sight of God. This history, almost without our perceiving it, is always bringing marvels before us. We should reject them with indignation were they but catastrophes invented to enliven a miraculous recital, but they are facts witnessed by those whose authority we cannot doubt. History, therefore, has a right to take them as ornaments, and to despise the invidious censures of him who presumes to rekon such events among the pious fables of over-credulous and unenlightened ages.

When Agnes' election for abbess of the monastery was reported to Monsignor Monaldeschi, Bishop of Orvieto, he went himself to Proceno to give her the consecrated veil according to the solemn rite of the Church. This ceremony was signalized by an extraordinary occurrence. When the prelate, preceded by all his clergy, went to the temple where it was to be performed, they were surprised on entering it to find the pavement, and the altars, and the high altar in particular, covered as it were by a shower of snow, with particles of the purest white in the form of small crosses, which we shall now, and when we have occasion to mention it again in the course of this history, designate by the name of manna, a word which expresses the novelty of the phenomenon, and signifies in the original Hebrew, *manhu, what is this?* The numerous concourse of people assembled there was surprised and astonished, and every one strove to collect a portion of that heavenly dew to keep as a memorial of this wonderful event. In the meantime the bishop went through the sacred function, restraining with great difficulty the tears caused by the tenderness and piety with which the prodigy and the angelic modesty of Agnes inspired him; and he afterwards declared that he had given the veil to a saint.

The shower of manna, as the Blessed Raymond of Capua, a man of most enlightened judgment, writes, was a favour which heaven bestowed upon Agnes every time that she prayed, and not only her clothes but the place she was in kept the

trace of the miracle. One day, when the holy virgin was covered with more manna than usual, one of her religious meeting her, thought that some snow had recently fallen on her, and stretched out her hand to shake her clothes, but Agnes smiled, and said, "Do not take that off me, for it is a visible sign of the spiritual sweetness which God deigns to grant me in prayer."

It was precisely the time of prayer in which she found means to inebriate herself with that inexpressible sweetness which is generally a proof of God's merciful love towards the just soul. Agnes' pure and ardent desires never knew those limits which satisfy a less elevated spirit. She followed all the movements of her ever active love, ever yielding to its new desires, and the less satisfied the more it discovers how pure and lovely is the object of its love. Neither were powerful incitements wanting to enlarge the sphere of Agnes' holy desires. We will give some specimens of these which rendered glorious to her the time in which they happened. The intimate union with her God, which this virgin enjoyed by the help of the powerful bonds of charity, often suggested thoughts which were connected with that tender longing to diminish, as far as possible, the distance between a soul confined for the present to enigmas and to darkness, and the Sovereign Good, who dwells in inaccessible light. The contemplation of the divine attributes is an abyss of inconceivable wonders, which, although it fatigues the mind, never diminishes the intensity of the love with

which the just soul rises above itself to adore them. The propensity of the human mind to allow itself to be seduced where error appears attractive, makes it rather easy to go astray in a region of dazzling light. The wish of contemplating the nature of God, and the idea of seeing Him when we only behold the creations of our own ardent imaginations, was the origin of many sects which were followed and spread by fanatics led by pride and vanity: but this chain of danger, darkness, and deceit, is completely annihilated by the true inspirations of holy and humble love, the child of faith, if we may use the expression.

When a holy soul turns to contemplate God, it begins by addressing Him a prayer of excuse and of holy fear, in which the heart expands with a sentiment of adoration, and recognises Him as the infinite and incomprehensible God, and entreats Him to cast one ray of His mercy on a vile creature, full of nothing but misery. Here faith lends her assistance, reminds the soul of all the mysteries of love worked for her by the Supreme Creator, and animates her with that supernatural courage which is produced by grace. The steps by which the soul arrives at God are the operations of charity; and thus the just one sighs, desponds, and revives in the flames of this charity, then raises itself towards God, and learns more and more how sweet it is to be near Him. Effects like these, described in several passages of the Holy Scriptures, were recognized in Agnes by those who examined her spirit. Her life of contemplation had no doubtful phases which

might give rise to the slightest suspicion that she was subject to giddiness during some moments of her exalted meditation. The most enduring laws of charity had become naturalized in her heart, and she well knew that the presumption of raising oneself in a lofty contemplation of the immense and uncreated Being, in order merely to free oneself from the obscurity of this present life, is not to seek God but one's own vanity, whose fleeting and corrosive bonds fall away in the presence of love. But when the soul feels the weight of its earthly condition with a sweet impatience, and desires to enlighten itself by the knowledge of God, inasmuch as He merits to be known and loved above all, as the beginning and end of all things, we may say that its right desires can safely hope that they are guided by charity, which is the most necessary and quickest means of union with God.

This enviable union with Heaven raised Agnes' sight to behold objects which can only be represented by supernatural colours. Although she moderated the desires of her heart by the most profound contempt of herself, she had been inflamed for some time with an intense desire of seeing and adoring the most holy Humanity of Jesus Christ, to which she was consecrated by an irrevocable promise as a spouse. Similar desires are not, as some false mystic theologians have asserted, a failing of faith ; on the contrary, directed by humble confidence, they may contribute greatly to keep up the vigour of that active faith which is the life of the just. It is

one thing to desire to convince ourselves, by the experience of our own senses, of the truth of some revealed mystery, which is an insult to the infallibility of revelation; and another to believe firmly that which we learn from the Scriptures and the Church, and to desire at the same time that God may glorify Himself still more in His ineffable works by giving us, if it pleases Him, and is consonant to our spiritual good, some sensible demonstration of them. There is nothing unworthy in this of our character, of the reverence we owe to faith, or of the nature of true piety. Thus Agnes, inspired by heaven, which was about to grant her this signal favour, could not overcome the desire of rejoicing in the sight of the life-giving flesh of the Redeemer of men, and at last had the consolation of finding that she had not desired in vain. The most holy Mary appeared to her with the most beautiful and beaming aspect on the night before the Feast of her Assumption, holding Jesus Christ in her arms, as the same tender infant that He willed to be in the first years of His stay on this earth. The consolation of Agnes was not limited to this sight alone, for the divine mother deigned to give for some time into her embrace, the precious and Divine fruit of her womb. Agnes did not die in that moment, as might have been expected, overwhelmed by the excess of her joy; but she summoned all her strength and all the powers of her soul to sustain her beating heart, and prolonged her tender communications with the heavenly Child, until, with loving reluctance, she

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had to restore Him to His mother's arms. Before He was taken from her she loosened a small cross of strange workmanship, which hung round His neck, and kept it for herself as a memorial of the honour she had received. When she saw the vision disappearing she uttered loud cries and fainted. Some of her religious sisters ran to her assistance when they heard that sorrowful cry, and found her stretched on the ground as if she were dead. She recovered with difficulty, and when she returned to the use of her senses she concealed the circumstance from all, except the one who was her spiritual guide, in spite of the inquiries which were put to her. We willingly admit that the pure and strong intellect, assisted by extraordinary light from heaven, was able to comprehend this wonderful sight, but it is further evident that the above-mentioned cross, the salutary sign of our redemption, deposited itself by a supernatural power in her hands at the moment when it seemed to her that she loosened it from the neck of the Divine Child.

It is not surprising that after obtaining such a privilege from the Word made flesh, Agnes should continue to receive new and still more special favours. As there is no mystery in religion which is more august, or which brings us more close to the Divinity than the adorable Eucharist, it has always been the dearest object of the love of all those souls which are remarkable for their faith and love. At this Divine banquet Agnes enjoyed the sweets of peace,

unction, and renovation, which cannot be described by mortal tongue; and, therefore, from the dawn of the day which was fixed for the reception of the sacramental species, she sighed and longed for the moment in which she might satisfy her pure desires, panting with uncontrollable transports after the fountain of life. It is not exactly known how many times a week her director permitted her to partake of the sacramental communion, but it seems probable, from the context of the old memoirs of her life, that she was not in the habit of approaching the table of the Divine Victim every day. Agnes knew the importance of the great act of her own weakness too well not to entertain the desire she felt of frequenting it daily, a frequency which we cannot disapprove, because we are clearly told by the history of the first ages of the Church, that the faithful were sometimes accustomed to fortify themselves daily against the difficulties and dangers of persecution with the Bread of the strong; but no praise could be given to him who imitated the early Christians in this respect, without imitating at the same time their golden simplicity, their complete detachment from earthly pomps and interests, and the fervour of their prayers. On the days when Agnes received the Divine Sacrament she redoubled, with the most pious dispositions, her fervent acts of religion, and actually obtained a pledge of the satisfaction of heaven, which assured her that the purity of her heart was adequate to that tremendous act, as far as it was

possible for that of a creature, still a pilgrim on this earth, to be. One Sunday morning, when she had retired before the dawn of day to pray in the most remote corner of the garden, as she frequently did, she let the hour for beginning the Divine Office pass without perceiving it, and lest she should be grieved by this pious delay, which put off the hour for receiving Holy Communion, an angel of the most beautiful aspect appeared to her, and gave her the most holy mysteries of the Body of Jesus Christ. The Blessed Raimond tells us that for nine successive Sundays she was fed with the Divine Eucharist by a messenger from heaven. It does not show a desire to multiply miracles without necessity, to believe with the most faithful historians, that Agnes received the life-giving sacrament from the hand of an angel, as may be inconsiderately imagined. It is true that Agnes' pious desires might have been satisfied without the angel's ministration, but it must be remembered that the Author of miracles works them when it pleases Him, with that liberty which is the prerogative of His omnipotence, in a way which cannot be searched by our feeble intelligence.

A similar reflection will entirely satisfy our minds when we are informed of the following circumstance, which is asserted with the greatest confidence by the Blessed Raimond of Capua. He tells us that Agnes, touched at the bottom of her heart by the consideration of the sufferings which our Divine Saviour endured for love of us, nourished a most intense desire of visiting those

parts of Palestine, which were sanctified by the presence of God made Man, when in His visible flesh He conversed with men. He adds that God was pleased to appease in a measure her holy and fervent desire, and caused the angelic spirits to bring her a clod of earth, which was enriched with some traces of the blood which the dying Saviour shed on Calvary, and also a fragment of the vase in which Jesus was washed in His earliest infancy.

We are not going to enter into a discussion of the question of similar relics, which is important enough to afford occupation to Catholic doctors and teachers of theology. Those relics, which, besides having been sanctified by the touch of the divine members of our Redeemer, bring Him before our minds as He was in the various circumstances of His life among men, are always worthy of the greatest veneration. It is most true that when our Saviour rose again to an immortal life He reunited to His body every drop of blood which He had shed in His Passion, lest His humanity should be found at His resurrection to have lost an integral part by His death: still the blood which appears in some relics ought to be regarded as miraculous, and figurative of that which dropped from the wounds of the Saviour, and consequently worthy of being venerated with the most sincere faith and devotion. The desire of examining how these precious relics can have been preserved and transmitted to us after the course of so many ages, is equivalent to scrutinizing the wonderful ways

of Providence, which, without doubt, has used every means to preserve them from the rapacity of time, and the revolutions which have desolated the earth.

Agnes, however, deposited the precious gift with jealous care among the other relics of the monastery. In process of time the Conventual Friars of St. Francis at Proceno obtained possession of those which were said to have been given by angels to St. Agnes, and the report is, that they were placed inside the head of a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, which was honoured in the church of Saint Martin. This tradition is corroborated by the fact that Monsignor Domenico Danesi, who flourished in the beginning of the seventeenth century, being informed of it by the Marchioness of Proceno, Lucrezia Pia Sforza, went in person to open the above-mentioned wooden image, and found a piece of earth in the expected spot, which had some red marks upon it, together with some packets of sacred relics.

In proportion as heaven heaped extraordinary favours on the head of Agnes, she, guided by a sentiment of true humility, studied to conceal them from the eyes of others; but in spite of all the efforts of that virtue, which, the richer it is, the more it strives to appear empty of all good, she was obliged to yield to the entreaties of those who sought the aid of her prayers in time of their distress. She became a consoler and a mother to all, conformably to the dictates of the most sincere charity, nor could she help

feeling great joy when her prayers for others were heard, because God was glorified by her means, and because the Gospel tells us to do good works sometimes openly, that praise may be given to our Father who is in heaven. The heavenly consolations that overflowed her whole spirit, and could spring from no other source but her love of God, were not the only proofs of how much He delighted in showering His mercies upon His beloved servant. His omnipotent hand, which reverses at pleasure the natural order of things, manifested itself also in other ways. The bread of which the monastery was, for some unknown reason in want, was twice multiplied at the prayer of Agnes. On two other occasions the worth of her confidence in Divine Providence was proved, by finding two empty jars of oil unexpectedly filled. Another time, when the monastery was entirely destitute of money, a large sum was suddenly found in the chest of the religious in whose care their common property was placed. Finally, when Agnes was dining with two pilgrims, whom she had received with the most benevolent hospitality, a fresh rose fell from above on the table, although it was the depth of winter, which was a subject of great astonishment to all those who were sitting at the table, and of humble strife, as each endeavoured to attribute this prodigy to the merit of the others. Perhaps some of our readers might wish us to describe all the minor circumstances relating to these occurrences which are given by others; but this is not the purpose of our Life. We know that

gratuitous gifts, like that of the power to work miracles, are not enough to make the possessor a saint, and since the relation of all the minute facts would lead us into long digressions, we are justified in omitting them, for our purpose is to place our saint's virtue in the right light, and not to attract the devout curiosity of those who, forming their ideas of virtue on those of the multitude, only seek for miracles and prodigies in the Lives of the Saints.

Although the above mentioned wonders deeply struck the minds of the religious women over whom Agnes presided, her constant and persevering manner of life was a more powerful argument for showing her every kind of reverence and respect, in spite of her unwillingness to receive it, for her desire was to be considered the lowest and vilest of all. But what caused the greatest admiration, were the austere mortifications to which she made a law of submitting herself. They might appear excessive, but they were suggested by love, which imparts incredible strength to just souls, in order that the virtue of penance may take root in them, and become a powerful habit, and increase the sphere and the beauty of all their other virtues by its sacrifices. During fifteen years, while Agnes governed the monastery of Proceno, she never tasted anything but bread and water, and this so sparingly, that they could not understand how such scanty nourishment could preserve her life and health. Her night's rest was never more than a short and uneasy sleep upon the bare ground; nay, she frequently passed the whole

night, from sunset to sunrise, in reading holy books, and exhaling her love of God in prayer, in weeping, and in sighs, without allowing herself one interval of quiet. She was ingenious in crucifying her own flesh ; she used to choose to do all her actions in the most fatiguing way, and in those circumstances which were most painful to her nature ; and further, used to scourge herself many times in some days of the week. This latter penance, which goes so far as to lacerate the body and to shed blood, might spring from a fanatical spirit, which makes a man cruel when he thinks he is generous and devout, if it were not regulated, as it was in Agnes, by a superior direction and by obedience to the minister of God, who can and ought to know when it may be conveniently permitted to pious souls. This method of afflicting and subduing her body, gave a new vigour to Agnes's spirit, and the desire of submitting it to a still heavier and more rigorous yoke, increased in proportion with the love which burnt within her. In fact, although the effects of such rough treatment showed themselves in her enfeebled body, her spirit grew in readiness and in alacrity, the greater because she knew that her works were a sweet holocaust in the sight of Heaven. Heaven continually employed this favourite soul as a suitable instrument of its glory. A native of Acquapendente was attacked by phrenzy, and all the remedies applied to him were useless. After some time, as his fury became every day more horrible and more dangerous, his neighbours firmly believed that he was tormented

by a malignant spirit, and treated him as a demoniac. It is not our business to discuss this fact, but we can assure our readers, that as soon as this wretch was presented to Agnes, who had gone on purpose to Acquapendente, he felt the power of her intercession, which obtained for him, from the Most High, a sudden and complete cure. When he was released from his misery he declared that he had been, until that moment, possessed by a devil; such was the violence of the malady which had disordered the nerves, the blood, and the electric fire which animates us, in a frightful manner. However that may be, the favour which God granted to Agnes's prayers remains the same, even if we do not venture to add this man to the list of the possessed. The devil was, moreover, confused and mocked on another rather dissimilar circumstance, when a victim, which he flattered himself that he securely possessed, was snatched from him. One of Agnes's friends was a rich man, who was led by his vices far from the path of eternal salvation. As he had often assisted the monastery with alms, Agnes used to recommend him fervently to the Most High, and regarded him with gratitude and partiality. She was totally ignorant of his unhappy state, for he managed, in spite of his bad conduct, to keep up a plausible appearance of probity and honour. But as soon as Agnes was shown, by a ray of heavenly light, the terrible situation of her misguided friend's soul, without loss of time she sent for him, and warned him with the greatest earnestness, to provide with all diligence for his

spiritual safety. "God has brought to my knowledge, with a certainty which does not admit of doubt," said she, "that in punishment of your crimes, a special kind of torment is prepared for you in the place of the damned; and it is God Himself, who is terrible in His justice, who has inspired me to tell you not to abuse to your ruin that time which He has granted you to repent in." These words roused that man, as it were, from a deep sleep, and he was moved to horror and repentance by looking at his past life. Agnes redoubled her humble prayers for him, and after a short time she had the consolation of seeing him contrite and determined to gain God's pardon. Furthermore, after his death she was fully consoled on his account, for she was told by an interior heavenly voice, that her departed friend had reached the haven of a blessed eternity.

Whether Agnes consoled herself by the proofs of the special love of Heaven which she received, or considered the weakness of our frail nature ever ready to impede the progress of virtue, her resignation to the will of God remained the same. The chances of life which are problems, that souls which fear them too much cannot solve, were to her so many inducements to increase her confidence in God. She frequently said, bursting into tears, "It is my God who preserves my life, it is He who gives me my being. How can it be other than certain that He does it for His glory? And the more He makes use of me for His glory. the more I am bound to give Him the tribute of my whole heart." Her invincible tranquillity was

never disturbed for an instant. She once fell into a state of total languor, which was accompanied by fatal symptoms, and she was the only one who gave no signs of sorrow. At last they ordered that, to restore her strength, which had been shattered by her uninterrupted macerations, she should eat some meat which was prepared expressly for her.

Agnes did not resist the order, but she merely raised her eyes to heaven and made a short prayer, and at the moment when she prepared to eat the meat, it was turned into fish by an unseen power. He who at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, changed the water into wine, to prevent the guests from being grieved, could without doubt change the meat into fish, that His beloved servant might have the satisfaction of observing, even in the time of illness, the severe laws of abstinence which she had laid down for herself.

Besides, the honour of the person who registered this event in the annals of that period, leaves us no room to doubt its reality. After Agnes had displayed proofs of heroic patience, her health partially returned.

During her long and trying malady, she never lost her accustomed cheerfulness, because it did not diminish her knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is a comfort which man never looses. If we make God present to our minds as He really is, no event will be able to shake their balance ; as a manifestation of unseen things greatly contributes to increase this lively perception of God's presence, and at the same time our love of Him.

After the saint's recovery she was consoled by a wonderful vision, in which she seemed to be admitted to contemplate the glory of her heavenly country. She was not really raised to behold that light which forms the happiness of the inhabitants of heaven, but the immense joys of that eternal kingdom were presented, as it were, by allegory to her intellect. Among the dearest objects which fixed her attention there, was the august throne of the Mother of God, who was clothed with the sun, and surrounded by ineffable beauty. A chosen choir of the brightest spirits stood round that sublime threshold, who celebrated the greatness of their Queen in most joyful songs and canticles. Heaven resounded with their voices, and except the triple sanctus to the Most Holy, there was nothing in the whole court of heaven more joyful and triumphant. After that vision Agnes frequently recited or sung a devout Latin hymn in honour of our Lady, which she said she had learnt from the angels on that occasion. It begins, "Vernans rosa, spes humilium propitia," which the blessed Raymond gives at length. It refers entirely to the seven joys relative to the incarnation and life of her Divine Son, which Mary most holy experienced. The sentiments are refined and expressive of devotion, but the style and the phrases are not concise, and are those of an age in which elegance of language and the dignity of the lyric metre had quite disappeared. But whoever endeavours to prove from this that it was not composed by angels, must recollect that those inspirations that saints and

prophets recorded in the Holy Scriptures, were worded according to the style of that period, the genius of the language and the character of the writer. Hence arises the difference of styles, one sublime and the other simple and familiar, between Isaias, Ezechiel, Jeremias, Amos, and the other prophets; though every one of them spoke by divine inspiration, they each used the language suited to their respective characters, and the age in which they lived. It is not, therefore, surprising that the praises which are given to Mary in heaven, should be expressed to Agnes, an innocent virgin, ignorant of letters, in the language that she herself would have used. When the angels speak by the mouths of others, they can, without derogating from their own perfection, adapt themselves to the instrument of which they make use, to make known their meaning to human minds. This vision left in Agnes's soul the seeds, so to speak, of unutterable joy, which greatly assisted the perfect recovery of her health.

She resumed all her ordinary practices of devotion, that she prescribed to herself when she undertook the government of her monastery. The general rule of this house was founded on that of the great Augustine, which is the most secure guide of all those communities whose members have united in order to attend to their advancement in Christian perfection, which is based, as St. Augustine, with the authority of the Gospel, begins by teaching us, upon the love of God and our neighbour. Upon this firm foundation, Agnes had built up those laws and those customs which

she thought most necessary for the government of her fellow religious, without binding herself to any particular institute. She was most careful to prevent idleness, dissipation, or slight jealousies from introducing the least disturbance in this family, and used her utmost skill in consulting the natural dispositions of each, that the Lord might come with the spirit of peace to dwell amongst them. They were accustomed to a holy and regular manner of life, but they were willing to give up their customs when any useful innovation was proposed. Agnes's gentle and obliging nature made her feel great compassion for the weaknesses or the wants of others, and she corrected or assisted them with such affability, that they had only to explain their circumstances and they obtained their desires. Instead of considering her companions as a burden entrusted to her care, she regarded them as her support and her crown. Those whose zeal is sour or fanatical, are disturbed and disquieted when it is their business to direct others in their religious duties, but true and enlightened zeal is full of loving confidence in its subjects. Whether they are weak or virtuous, it always considers them as its children, whom it must, with grief sometimes, but always with love and patience, bring forth for Jesus Christ, as St. Paul said. In spite of the rank of mother, which she held over the others, she was rather averse to claiming any title of superiority. She only considered her elevation as an obligation to be holier than the others, and this species of obligation was quite consonant to her inclinations.

On the other hand, desirous to live only for herself, freed from the burden of government, and anxious to be of use to others, without being responsible for them before God, she used every means, and at last, after many failures and long efforts, succeeded in withdrawing from the office of superioress.

We cannot refrain from giving some account of the way in which she spent the next seven years, the remainder of her stay in Proceno.

The whole edifice of Christian perfection, being, as we have already said, founded upon love, this love is also the root of the habit of the other virtues, and from it spring all the outward actions which show a complete detachment from creatures. The progress of it is rendered more admirable in the souls of those who are travellers on this earth, the more it resembles that love which inflames and makes happy the inhabitants of heaven. Hence we may imagine to what a lofty degree of perfection Agnes was tending. Her thoughts found no rest, unless they were centered in God, and every short moment in which some passing distraction prevented her from fixing them on her uncreated Good, brought with it a complication of sufferings. This love is tried by moments of distraction, of tempest, and of dryness, but it merits by its constancy in bearing them, and the flood of its former sweetnesses returns. The faintings, the raptures and abstractions, the intermission of the physical powers, which sometimes accompany its breathless transports, are not deliriums like those produced by

erring passions, but they are caused by ineffable tenderness, and an inexpressible desire to be freed from the bonds of the body, and to love God where love triumphs for ever and ever, without any rival feelings. From this fountain Agnes drew her unwearied aspirations to the hidden treasures, the bright light of her faith, which guided her in the paths of justice, her perpetual vigilance by which she kept her heart free from every irregular tendency, and finally her extreme desire of making herself worthy of the words and the chaste embraces of her celestial Spouse. We can easily imagine, further, how deep the poverty of her spirit, and how beautiful and fragrant the flowers of her purity were, since detachment from the goods and pleasures of this life is an indispensable part of the laws of the love of God. Frequent acts of piety, and the continual exercises of every virtue, had, as is their wont, furnished Agnes with the method of collecting all her thoughts in God under every circumstance, so that everything she beheld became to her a book in which she read of truth and love, in fact, God Himself. Her desire of living entirely hidden in Jesus Christ, would have led her to conceal what she felt from the knowledge of men, unless the account of the sweetnesses which inundated her heart had been drawn from her by holy obedience.

Indeed, her reputation for virtue was very great, and widely spread. The name of Agnes was always spoken with respect, and cited whenever the speaker wished to give an idea of extraordinary

purity. Men who were illustrious for their dignity or their learning, were ambitious of keeping up a frequent correspondence with her; but it was very difficult to do this with one who sought to fly from every opportunity of gaining credit, and was intimately persuaded of her own littleness and unworthiness. On one occasion, however, her humility yielded to the just argument of the fitness, and the advantages of leaving her beloved Proceno for a short time. From the time that she left Montepulciano, twenty-two years ago, she had been regretted by her fellow-citizens, and now excited more than ever by the fame of her holy life, they asked her with anxiety to come amongst them for their universal consolation. At first she replied, that she would assist them by her prayers as far as she could, and thus show her gratitude for their benevolence towards her; and begged them to excuse her from leaving the abode to which God had called her, and making a journey which did not appear suitable to a virgin of her calling. These objections only increased the urgency of their request, which they supported by motives of piety, and added to their own the entreaties of the religious women, among whom Agnes had retired when she first left the world, and they did so much that at last Agnes consented, moved by a spirit of discretion and loving prudence, which is quite compatible with perfection. Thus as the laws of enclosure in cloisters were not then made, Agnes went to her native town in the company of some of her reli-

gious sisters, and was received there, as may be supposed, with unusual demonstrations of joy and satisfaction. The short stay which she made there, was an uninterrupted course of holy and charitable works. Her exhortations to the fear of God, to concord, and to the works of justice sowed seeds of the best promise in many of their hearts. The sorrow they felt at her departure, was proportionate to the universal joy and contentment inspired by her presence; but mindful of the promise of returning speedily, that she had made to her religious daughters at Proceno, she turned a deaf ear to the tears and entreaties of those who advised her to remain in her own country for ever. She went back to the place which might be called the fruit of her toil, and a chosen vine deserving of all her affection. The time she had spent out of her monastery had not obscured the least of her virtuous intentions, nor did tenderness for her friends and relations diminish by one iota the joy which that retirement and solitude caused her. Here she continued that chain of victories which, in her conflict for heaven, she gained over all the oppositions of this present life. She served her God faithfully, and desired nothing else on this earth. The only unsatisfied desire of her heart was for heaven, but she had a secret presentiment that she had to go over a long and weary road before she attained her reward.

PART II.

SECTION I.

Agnes is inspired to undertake fresh enterprises.—She returns to her country.—Revolutions in Montepulciano.—Agnes commences the building of a monastery; of which she is made superioress.—She gives a bright example of perfection.—Her wisdom and prudence.—She introduces the rule of St. Dominic in her new monastery.—Her care to promote religious observance.—Her spirit of solitude and peace.—The walls of the monastery fall down and are rebuilt.—Agnes' journey to Rome, and the incidents of it.—Her return to Montepulciano.—Her internal lights.

The designs of the Most High for Agnes, caused changes in her life which she never expected. She always regarded the monastery of Proceno as a home which she was never again to leave. Her private capacity was grateful to her in proportion as it was free from all cares, which were contrary to her inclinations; and she flattered herself that she was to profit by it during the remainder of her life. Heaven seemed to approve of this desire by favouring her choice of Proceno in so many ways, but she nevertheless was quietly prepared to follow the will of God with all promptitude, whenever it was made known to her. In the mean time she began to experience sensations which seemed to lead to unknown consequences, and some rays fell on her soul which were like the forerunners of some novel event.

That house of infamy, which had been pointed out to her in Montepulciano twenty-two years ago, returned to her memory oftener than was natural. She was extremely afflicted that no one thought of purging that spot of such indecency. Once in the midst of her grief she seemed to say to herself, "Cast your eyes there where such an abominable vice reigns secure. Your country expects great things from you, and in that spot it will crown you with such glory, that the end of your days will be envied. Your delay in that place will perhaps cause others to suspect your virtue, which cares rather more for your own peace, than for the spiritual good of others. But no, your life and your name will not be a problem in history. Follow the call of heaven, and do not fear to be deceived." The tenderness which these inspirations excited in the heart of Agnes cannot be described; but as she was still uncertain what the undertaking was which she was to commence, they were only half perceptible landmarks in a doubtful path. Desirous of knowing clearly what the will of God might be, she implored, without ceasing day and night, that He would clear up these doubts. She frequently was heard to break out in her transports in an exclamation such as this; "Do not conceal, O my only Good, Thy adorable designs any longer from the eyes of Thy servant, this uncertainty is too great a torment to the love which I owe Thee; I do not wish to refuse this trial, my fidelity suffers greatly in it, but is quite prepared to go through it; but do Thou, most merciful

and just Lord, accept the sacrifice of my sorrowing spirit, and condescend to console Thy victim by manifesting the way in which she is to immolate herself to Thee." She concluded her prayer with the sign of the cross, adding, "May Thy will, O most merciful God, be done now and for ever."

It was seen in the case of Agnes that the prayers of the just pierce the sky, and rise like a sweet perfume before the Most High. She saw in prophetic symbols the road she should take to execute the intentions of Providence. She was once raised, by means of a hidden power, to contemplate things far above those we see with our senses. She seemed to stand on the shore of a vast ocean, whose raging waters appeared to challenge the clouds to a battle. The tempest was suddenly hushed and the wind calmed, when Agnes saw three ships approach the shore, each navigated by a person of lofty bearing, whose dress showed them to be St. Augustine, St. Dominic, and St. Francis. Each invited her courteously to enter his ship, thus to pass safely over the perilous waves; but the equality of their respective merits, kept her for a short time in reverential doubt, when St. Dominic put an end to the delay, and stretching out his right hand, assisted her to mount the deck of his bark. This vision might be taken for a natural dream, were it not that as soon as it vanished from the mind of Agnes an angel descended from heaven and unfolded its mysteries to her. "The life of mortals," said he, "on this low region of earth,

is precisely a sea agitated by a violent storm. Fly, therefore, from its perils, and leave those who serve the world to be shipwrecked. You have already separated yourself from it, by following part of the rule of St. Francis with the religious of Sacco, and embracing part of that of St. Augustine here in Proceno. But God further wills that you should return to your country, and consecrate yourself to the Institute of His servant Dominic, and build a monastery in that very place, where, as you well know, incontinence now reigns. This building is the work which the Mother of God told you to undertake, and for which she gave you the three stones, which you keep by you." Having said this, the angel vanished, leaving Agnes overjoyed at what she had seen and heard; and she very shortly put it in practice and set out for Montepulciano.

Thus led back to her own country by unmistakeable calls from heaven, in the year 1306, she exerted herself to the utmost to purchase the site which had been pointed out to her. Armed with faith she overcame with intrepidity every obstacle. She bought the spot for 1,200 *lire*, which she had received from her relations, and persons who were attached to her. Having obtained from Monsignor Ildebrandino, the bishop of Arezzo, permission to build a church and monastery, she occupied herself entirely in commencing the work, and in demolishing the old building from the foundations, to make room for the new one. The bishop of Arezzo entrusted the laying of the first stone to the celebrated

Father Bonaventura Forteguerri of Pistoja, at that time prior of the Servite convent at Montepulciano, whose piety, learning, and apostolic zeal, made him remarkable in the annals of his order. The church was completed at the same time as the monastery, and called Santa Maria Novella. The latter was exactly suited to Agnes' taste; it was built in the humblest and poorest style, the walls between the cells being even frail. She had no view in erecting it, except that of opening a school of humility, of retirement, and of detachment from all worldly pomp, and making a home for innocent souls who should adore the Father who is in heaven in spirit and in truth.

Some might wonder that this monastery, the most precious fruit of Agnes' labour, was built upon such a small, and it might be said, mean plan, when it might by conjunctures, not to be expected to return after that first period, be made more ample and secure. It must be confessed that that part of the building which was inhabited by the nuns was small, clumsy, and inconvenient; but when we reflect that all the religious houses which rose under the eyes of their saintly founders, were built without the slightest regard to either ornament, comfort, or convenience, we shall begin to understand the cause of this seeming negligence. Besides, the invasions of the northern nations had buried architecture, together with the other fine arts, under the ruins of the Roman Empire, where it had attained the highest degree of splendour, after having been cultivated by the Egyptians, and perfected by

the Greeks; so that in the first part of the fourteenth century there was scarcely any elegance in the buildings of the proudest cities, and none in those of villages or small towns. Finally, as this digression is not useless, we will add that the restricted habitation which Agnes had laid out for herself, not only gratified her love of poverty, but was consistent with the sentiments which virtue inspired in the hearts even of the Gentiles. They respected a hut as much as a palace, when it was inhabited by justice, generosity, honour, and good faith; and can any refuse to honour a house which was the permanent abode of so much virtue? In the best ages of the Republic the ancient Romans did not think that the house honoured its owner, but that he was its ornament and glory. Plutarch tells us that Elius Tubero, a great and good man, possessed nothing but one small house in the city and another in the country, where sixteen near relations of the Elian family lived with their wives, and a great number of their little children. Besides, Pliny relates among the virtues of his Trajan that he thought it a part of true glory to build with modesty, economy and simplicity. Still the reasons which led Agnes to endeavour that her work should have nothing great in the eyes of men, were far higher than theirs.

She sought and deserved the approbation of heaven. Many young women assembled round Agnes offered in those walls the acceptable sacrifice of their hearts. The above-mentioned Father Forteguerri, by commission of the bishop of

Arezzo, received at their request their religious vows, to bind them still more to this manner of life, though they did not engage themselves to any particular institute. The holy works which are done in consequence of a vow are twice as meritorious as those which are done by choice, because the vow itself is the most excellent act of worship which is rendered to God. These engagements require, it is true, previous deliberation, but the obligation, or necessity, which they impose of doing good, in nowise diminishes the liberty which merit presupposes; on the contrary, St. Augustine terms it: "Felix necessitas, quæ ad meliora compellit;"—a happy necessity which compels us to good works. These bonds increased the fervour of the young nuns. It was necessary at this period to choose one who should have the management of the others. Father Forteguerri displayed great care about this choice, but he left it entirely in the hands of the religious, since it was but just that their voluntary obedience should be paid to one, in obeying whom they might be reminded of their vows. There was no necessity for long deliberation who would be most popular in this capacity, and Agnes was unanimously elected for their common mother.

A peculiar custom of the time is observable at this part of the history. As soon as the bishop was informed of the election made by the nuns of Santa Maria Novella, although it gave him great satisfaction, he ordered the rector of the church of St. Bernard at Montepulciano,

who was called Ser Bindo, to publish this election to the people, and to report to him any objection which was made by them. It gave general satisfaction to see a virgin so renowned for her piety placed at the head of that chaste company, and the bishop being thus assured of the public approbation, commissioned Forteguerri to put Agnes in possession of the monastery.

Her elevation, the desire of cultivating these tender plants newly consecrated to the Most High, a sentiment of profound gratitude to God for having opened to her a way of changing that contaminated spot into a habitation worthy of His most pure regards, were so many stimulants to her to pant still more after Christian perfection. Such was her example of retirement, of continual prayer, of modesty, and of love for heavenly things, that it was more possible to admire than imitate her. It is certain that no virtue is too sublime and unapproachable to be the object of our imitation, since our Divine Master exhorted His faithful companions to take the perfection of our heavenly Father Himself as the model of theirs: but still every one cannot aspire to certain heights which may inspire despair to common courage. He alone who from on high calls some to greater things, can give them gifts necessary to reach them. He showered them in profusion on Agnes, so that it is no wonder she reached that perfection which those who admired her found it difficult to follow. The precept of being perfect is binding on every Christian, as far as it requires the exact obser-

vance of the divine commandments, because that is included in the baptismal vow. But among these general kinds of perfection, well known to all, it is necessary to a full understanding of our subject that we define precisely what is meant by saying that just souls arrive at a heroic degree of perfection in this life.

Having begun by supposing that the love of God is its foundation and basis, we may consider perfection animated by love in three ways. The first is when God is loved as much as He is loveable; but this exceeds the power of a simple creature, and is only possible to God, for He is essentially the Sovereign Good, and necessarily loves Himself in proportion to the vastness of His infinite sphere. Then there is that perfection by which the loving soul is drawn to God with all its affections not excepting the least tendency, by an actual and unwearied aspiration which prevents it from living on anything but love. This is the condition of the blessed in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, but it is not attainable during our mortal pilgrimage, which of necessity occasions innocent interruptions to the habitual energy of love. The last kind of perfection is that which remains for the consolation of man, and consists in excluding from us everything which is contrary to the impetus of our love towards God. This last kind, however, has two states. In the first, the human heart puts from it everything which might extinguish or weaken charity which cannot exist together with sin; in the second, it removes every obstacle

which hinders it from consecrating its affections wholly to love. The soul lives in charity when it guards against the infection of sin; but its charity is perfect only when it has no earthly rival to dispute the dominion of the heart. The more ready, willing, pure, and firm the heart is in the practice of only admitting love, the more reason there is to call it perfect.

These principles, borrowed from a most illustrious authority,* show us clearly how sublime the state of the just soul is in this present life, and help us to penetrate to a certain degree into the spirit of Agnes, who gave such extraordinary examples of virtue to others.

It would have been necessary to have made her progress to equal her perfection. She therefore gave her hand, as we may say, to help her companions by her advice, by her instructions and sweet manners, to attain all those qualities which might render the sacrifice they had made of themselves still more pleasing to the Lord She frequently exhorted them to watch lest any attachment to earthly things should insinuate itself into their hearts which had generously renounced them, because such attachments are generally a hurtful plant, which destroys the most promising seeds. The voice of such a watchful and exemplary mother was attended to as it ought to be; nay, we are told that Agnes was sometimes obliged to moderate the fervour of some of her sisters, whose voluntary mortifi-

* St. Thomas, 2. 2. q. 184. art. 2.

cations would have exceeded the just limits of prudence. Agnes was as full of wisdom and tenderness in her conduct towards others, as she was severe and inexorable towards herself; and used to guide them by such laws as they could not mistake, and have the additional disadvantage of suffering without merit. The maceration of the body cannot be acceptable to God, unless it has the signs which render it so; that is, unless it is used with due discretion, and obtains its end of stopping the fountain of rebellion without oppressing nature too much. It is a common and natural illusion to the irrational mind, which leads man almost to destroy his life; and to distinguish folly from virtue we must find the conditions just mentioned, to be sure that the works of penance are regulated by the laws of Christian discretion, and are full of gentleness, that they have the end for which they are done in view, and finally, that they do not pass the lawful bounds of this end. For this reason St. Paul, after having exhorted us to offer our bodies a living and holy victim, worthy of the Divine pleasure, added that the kind of worship required by God ought to be reasonable in all things, and agreeable to the dictates of an enlightened prudence.* It does, nevertheless, not unfrequently happen that some beloved souls are led by supernatural instinct to afflict their own members in an extraordinary way. In such cases, God, who inspires this purpose, gives them besides the

* Romans, xii. 1. "Your reasonable service."

strength which is required to support such austerity which would otherwise be excessive; and as their strength is increased, their nature does not succumb, so that their service is always reasonable, and most worthy of praise and reward. Agnes was herself in the position to use the most exquisite kinds of voluntary mortification, while on the other hand, she was filled with very penetrating discretion in regulating the conduct of others when she perceived that they were inclined to an excess of misguided fervour.

The prompt and filial docility which St. Agnes always found in her subjects, did not fail when she convoked them together, and decided to announce to them her private intention of introducing and establishing for ever in the monastery the constitutions of the order of St. Dominic; and her desire that they should all unite to put on the habit and submit to the rule of this order. Mindful of the instructions of Heaven, Agnes was never satisfied until she had executed this project. It would be, in the face of the incontrovertible evidence in favour of it, an absurd and unseasonable criticism to raise a question whether Agnes really entered the order of preachers. This doubt, which never deserved to be broached, was settled by such sound reasons, that it would be too inopportune to recall this groundless objection. When Agnes found that her sisters' inclinations agreed with hers, after a few days of more fervent prayer, she carried out their desires. The monastery was submitted to the care of the Friars Preachers, and in the introduction of the

rule of that order, the religious virgins found no novelty which startled them. They were already bound by the vows of religion, and lived in the constant practice of piety, mortification, and fervour. The rule only brought these under a fixed and regular method, which did not entail any grave or particular obligation, and consequently did not impose any too difficult duty. Nothing, however, was proposed or concluded in this affair, without first obtaining the approbation of the bishop Ildebrandino, of Arezzo. As he had lent every assistance to enable Agnes to build the church and the monastery, he was much pleased that she took means to consolidate her work by establishing laws so wise and so suitable to this end. Besides, the laudable prudence of Agnes's whole conduct justly pleased a prelate of keen discernment, mature counsel, and deliberate judgment like Ildebrandino. This is not the place to praise him, but we must mention that he is remembered with honour in the history of the Church of Arezzo. The troubles and changes of those times frequently placed him in a critical situation. His death was regretted by the greatest part of his flock; he was succeeded in 1312 by the celebrated Guido of Pietramala, a warlike bishop. He was endowed with noble qualities of soul and body, but forgetful for the most part of the peaceful duties of his ministry, he became lord of Arezzo, and having pursued with arms the Guelph party, who recognized the Pope, John XXII., for their head, he called Louis of Bavaria into Italy, and together with Federigo de' Maggi, bishop of

Brescia, and Arrigo, bishop of Trent, crowned him with the iron crown, and his wife Margaret with the golden one, in the basilica of St. Ambrose, at Milan.

The spiritual advantages which the regular system just introduced brought to Agnes's daughters, are sufficent proofs of the propriety of her plans. All that certain customs of piety and tried wisdom can do to advance Christian perfection, concurred to help Agnes's labours in the cultivation of her monastery.*

She was accustomed to protest that the observance of the most minute rules of the institute had an indefinable importance, because, in no system composed of parts, can the smallest parts be separated from the others without altering it. Hence she was very careful that the most ordinary practices should be observed with the greatest exactitude, when they related to the primary laws of a monastic life.

But as she knew that the human mind, naturally prone to bondage and prejudice, is much weakened by allowing itself to depend on some of the minute externals of religion, without attending to the spirit of them, she sedulously inspired the minds of her sisters with those wise maxims

* In the course of time the number of religious in the monastery diminished greatly, as well as their original strictness, so earnestly inculcated by their glorious foundress, and Pope Eugenius IV., in a bull of the 19th of June, 1435, ordered that these nuns should be transferred to the convent of Dominicanesses of San Paolo at Orvieto, and their monastery occupied by the fathers of the same order, who for some reason only took possession of it, and removed to it from the hospice they had had in Montepulciano since 1276, thirty-six years afterwards; that is, on the 15th of March, 1472.

of discretion, which prevent virtue from becoming wearisome, and being full of misguided zeal, or the slave of a pharisaical attachment to small observances, which are generally only endeared to us by our self-love.

In order to succeed in the difficult task of obtaining her end, without making a mistake, or misusing any of her means, Agnes examined and judged her own piety as well as that of the others, by that light which shows us whether charity flourishes truly in our hearts, or not. Seeing that this charity helped them to live, always ready to suffer a perpetual want, almost of all earthly comforts, for the hope of greater and more lasting rewards, she concluded that all the other observances of their rule would be easy to those who sought to gain for themselves by sufferings a permanent abode in heaven. Indeed, the total alienation from all the goods of earth, and the love of mortification which reigned in the hearts of those virgins, animated by the instructions and examples of Agnes, could only have sprung from the strength of their love of God. Their habitations breathed the spirit of poverty; no more food was ever provided than was enough to last for the day's consumption, and the best part was set aside for the poor. Whatever had the least appearance of splendour or of luxury, was carefully excluded, and even in their principal wants they liked to feel some of the hardships of poverty. Austerity and patience seemed their common and their favourite portion.

Our saint's retirement in this poor abode was

like a sweet sleep, in which she reposed in the perfect peace of her heart, insensible to everything on earth. If the wise man can, even in the midst of the noise of the business and cares of life, make a happy solitude in the mind, while that of others is disturbed by their agitations, it is easy to conceive how Agnes happily lived, and free from all uneasy distractions, separated in mind, and we may say in body likewise, from the world. This may appear a paradox to those who, immersed in the delirium of their passions, cannot understand the true happiness of the soul which devotes itself to study and to know the sovereign truths.

We grant that the mutual assistance given in society, makes an immense difference between the state of a person in the world and the solitary state, a difference which is entirely to the advantage of the former. But without recurring to the superior principles taught us by faith, is it not true, that the pursuit of pleasure in the midst of the world, is almost always degrading to man, who has only the pleasure of parade, of which he is doubly the victim; first for the labour which it costs him; and secondly, for the appearance of pomp, which humiliates and tramples upon his own? Pleasures themselves generate a dulness and weariness, which forces the worldling, if he ever has an interval of light, to envy the calmness of him whose meals are frugal, and who sleeps placidly on a hard bed, after having spent the day in the company of his own thonghts, or in contemplating the truth,

or in making acts of homage to his Creator. The reason why we prefer social comforts and pleasures to a manner of life which will always be extravagant in public opinion, is, that we are attached to various conveniences and enjoyments, which habit has transformed into wants. It is necessary, however, that he who choses this life of quiet and retirement, of which we have pointed out the advantages, should declare a perpetual war against idleness, and use every means suited to his condition, of doing good to his neighbour; otherwise his conduct would be a tissue of unwarrantable absurdities, against which religion would be the first to protest. A soul which is penetrated by true love of God and the excellence of its own duties, guards with great caution against placing itself in a false position.

The life which Agnes led, varied by the ineffable sweetness which the God of peace infused into her soul, and continually employed in pious exercises, gave her no causes for disturbance or self-reproach. If her calmness had been based on a less solid foundation than lively faith in Divine assistance, it would have been in danger of failing at this period. When it was least to be expected, a great part of the walls of the church and monastery, which had cost Agnes so much toil and anxiety, fell down suddenly. Their bad construction did not, it is true, promise a long duration, but no one could have even suspected that they would crumble in the course of four or five years. One historian attributes

the catastrophe to the shock of an earthquake, but whatever was the cause, it without doubt grieved Agnes, but she consoled herself by remembering that no one had perished, and by her unflinching resignation to the Will of God, who would give her the means of repairing the mischief. She decided to make known her necessities to the representatives of the community. A public council being convoked to that effect, on the 6th of April, 1311, Guglielmo del Pecora, a man of great experience and reputation, spoke with much warmth in favour of Agnes, and showed that it was a public duty to lend every assistance to the disconsolate virgins, whose monastery was in ruins. He met with no opposition, and some deputies were named to preside over the expenses, which the community should incur by this undertaking. The church and monastery were rebuilt in a remarkably short time on a far handsomer scale. Its completion was hastened by some private, in addition to the public, donations. A rich and pious woman in particular, contributed a considerable sum of money left her by her father. It said, that, knowing her father's wish that it should be spent in alms, and doubting how to employ it in the best way, a mysterious dream which she had three times put an end to her doubts. She dreamed that she saw a ladder, by which many angels ascended and descended, whose top rested on the clouds, and the foot on the little hill where Agnes had raised her humble edifice. When this fell down unexpectedly the pious lady was moved to spend

the legacy upon a spot which was consecrated by the angels who had appeared to her there; and indeed her dream had been thus interpreted to her by another woman of a holy life, whom she had consulted. This dream is recorded by all the old writers of this history, and we, while we reverence every trace of that Providence which is always rich in the means of bending men's wills to its own most wise ends, will leave it with its deserved reputation of probability.

It now appeared to Agnes that nothing remained for her but to end her days in the beloved shelter of the renewed monastery, without ever leaving it, and to give herself up entirely to her chaste affections which drew her to God. After some time, however, she felt inspired to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Distrustful and fearful of her own lights, she communicated her ideas to her director, who made no opposition, as they appeared perfectly just and well founded. This journey may seem to have been suggested by lightness, by useless curiosity, or by a mind impatient of too close retirement, but it sprung in reality from ardent piety, and the desire of seeing many august trophies of our religion which are kept in Rome, and its purpose was to have the establishment of her monastery confirmed by Papal authority. When she arrived in Rome she obtained everything she desired with respect to it from Monsignor Arnaldo, bishop of Sabina, Legate of Clement V., who was then absent from Rome. He was raised to the Chair of St. Peter from the Archbishopric of Bordeaux, on the 5th

of June 1305, and crowned at Lyons in the church of St. Just, on the 14th of November, in the presence of Philippe le Bel, king of France, and other princes. After wandering through France, he fixed his seat at Avignon in 1309, where the Roman Pontiffs resided, till the time of Gregory IX., for seventy years.

Although Agnes observed a rigorous retirement during her stay in Rome, in order to preserve herself from all dissipation, the conversations she had on her business with several members of that court, and her whole conduct, showed, in spite of her humility, what a noble soul was hidden under that poor and ignoble appearance. Many illustrious persons sought her in hopes of hearing her wise discourses, but far from being seduced to trust in the protection of the great, she continued to repose all her confidence in God. With tender and enlightened piety she went to appease her longings in contemplating the relics of the martyrs and envying their triumphs. She wished before she left that city to obtain some relics of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, for whom she had a singular devotion; but her humility prevented her from making this request to those who could have satisfied her desire with ease. She was consoled in a supernatural manner. One day when she was in the Basilica of the Apostles, absorbed in a fervent meditation on their glorious actions, two small pieces of cloth fell into her hands, and it was revealed to her at the same time that those fragments of ancient robes were precisely

those she so much desired. The known existence of these relics removed all doubt of their authenticity, and the manner in which Agnes received them was clearly miraculous. We may hence easily imagine with what feelings of joy and pious thankfulness she left Rome, still more convinced that heavenly favours are always ready for the just desires of the heart, which regards God as its generous and tender Father.

She returned to her country and to her monastery, filled with fresh eagerness to make progress in the school of virtue. The gifts she received from heaven, children of a particular grace, helped each other to increase in her soul. She described the spiritual riches which she so happily possessed in unfolding the history of her heart to him, who, because of his sacred ministry, stood in the place of God to her. We will give some examples of them, though this is too high a subject for ordinary minds. The gift of faith was in her heart, so strengthened by love, that she knew and felt that God is the highest and sovereign good, and that it is the worst of evils to be separated from Him. This vivid and vigorous faith was united to that filial timidity, which is a portion of that sweet anxiety natural to a loving heart. Not that her mind was ever wanting in abundant light, which showed her how to balance all the tender agitation arising from the consideration of her natural weakness, with equal encouragements. She renewed her protestations and her acts of love almost every moment, and sometimes felt her

spirit raised to such sublime heights, that she had reason to doubt whether her nature was being changed, or whether she still existed in flesh and blood. It was the same feeling which one day caused the Apostle Paul to say that he knew not where he lived, and to protest that Jesus Christ alone lived within his heart.* Such a bright and splendid light shone upon our holy virgin's soul, that its rays dispelled every obstacle which might arrest her progress in the path marked out for her. It has been ascertained by holy doctors that the infused light of the Holy Spirit contributes rather to perfect the will than the intellect. Hence a soul rich in such inspirations runs with equal rapidity in the course of the science of the saints, and in that of the actual exercises of meritorious works. This soul cannot ignore its own progress without doubting the evidence of them; but the more reluctant she is in ascribing any credit to herself, the more anxious she is to return the glory of her merits, which she knows, to the beneficent author of them. This was the state of Agnes' soul. Filled with gifts, with light, with sweetnesses, with humble timidity, with faithful gratitude, her own state was a motive for her sacrifices, her worship, and her gratitude to the sovereign distributer of all good. She was not, however, entirely free from some doubts as to the conduct she ought to pursue. When they arose, she regulated herself by the safest principles, and

* Galatians ii. 20. Philip i. 21.

made her doubts an incitement to seek counsel from the Father of lights, and to love Him with more fervour, the more she felt the misery and darkness of the present condition of man. A celebrated writer says, that what appears a pain, may become, by God's help, very useful to us, for if there were no darkness, man would never feel the depth of his own corruption ; and if there were no light, he would not seek for any remedy. Thus it is not only just, but advantageous, that God should show Himself in part, and conceal Himself in part from our thoughts ; for the knowledge of God in this present life without the knowledge of our own misery, would be no less an evil than the knowledge of our misery without the knowledge of God.

SECTION II.

Agnes makes further progress in piety.—The events of this period of her life.—Her confidence in God's help.—She delivers a possessed man.—Her humility.—She cures a nun who had lost her sight.—She multiplies the bread.—Her anxiety for the instruction of her Religious.—She receives a warning of future evils.—Her illness, and journey to the baths of Chianciano.—The wonders which happened to her there.—Her gentleness.—She returns to Montepulciano.—Her love of God.—She prophecies public misfortunes.—Her last sickness and death.—What occurred shortly after her death.

The more we learn of Agnes' history, the more distinctly we see that she was destined to enjoy certain particular favours of heaven, which sweeten whatever is hard in living in the body according to the laws of the spirit. She did not remember, as she herself frequently protested, with sentiments of tender gratitude, ever to have desired anything that God, in His merciful condescension towards her, did not quickly grant. Although her piety was founded on the secure bonds of the holiest love, it was not above being promoted by some accidental motives furnished by things subject to the senses. If, as reason and the Scriptures teach us, we ought at the sight of created things to raise our minds to the contemplation of the invisible Maker of them, we have still greater reason for making the external symbols of religion an inducement and encouragement to fulfil our duties to God whom we worship: otherwise our worship would become pharisaical,

by being confined to exterior actions, or imperfect because simply limited to the heart. The heart is, it is true, the seat of piety, but the greatest saints of the Gospel invariably practised certain methods and holy customs, which the intolerance of worldlings strives to pass off for the weaknesses planted by superstition in the imagination of the multitude.

We are told that, besides reciting the psalms and other prayers which are sanctified by the use and approbation of the Church, Agnes was accustomed to exercise herself in the devotion of the stations, in visits to sacred oratories, and in many fervent preparations for the solemnities and feast days. Prostrations and other forms of worship not unknown in the first ages of Christianity, were familiar to her. The most solid piety, under the direction of the love of God, knows how to animate and to turn to the best end all that the eye of human wisdom despises as signs of littlemindedness. After this preface we shall not wonder that Agnes pressed the religious of Proceno to return to her the little cross which she had left with them, and which she obtained, as we have heard by a singular favour in a vision. These nuns had no longer any hope of seeing her return to them. She had begged them by letter to set their minds at rest on this point, for it was evidently the will of God that she should remain at Montepulciano, and at the same time asked them to send her the well known cross, which she justly prized. This last request was absolutely refused, for the religious could not

bring themselves to part with such a venerated object, which they preserved locked up with great care. Their intentions were however completely frustrated, for they soon discovered that the cross had left its reliquary, contrary to all expectations, and learnt that it had returned to those hands, which had had one day the privilege of loosening it from the neck of our Lord made man when He appeared in the form of a little Child. This transmigration is given as a miracle by the historians, and indeed we should have to suppose too many most improbable circumstances if we endeavoured to make out that it was an illusion caused by human artifice. The simple and ingenuous candour of Agnes' character is alone abundant proof that she was incapable of practising, or being an accomplice to, the smallest deceit, however innocent. Virtue never yields to an impulse which has the slightest appearance of irregularity, and flies, according to St. Paul's warning, even the shadow of evil.*

When Agnes was consoled by the possession of this treasure, in such a surprising manner, she wrote as follows to the nuns of Proceno: "Do you not see that when my repeated instances could not obtain what I wanted from you, a single prayer which I made to my heavenly Spouse was enough to triumph over all your reluctance? You had good reasons for refusing to deprive yourselves of that tender pledge of salvation; and now I have still better reasons

* 1 Thessalonians, v. 22

for telling you to trust always in the Lord." In fact, this was the favourite counsel which Agnes was always insinuating, namely, to keep their confidence in the Divine help alive and always firm in their hearts. She herself gave such a bright and unfailing example of this, that many said that by merely looking at her countenance they were filled with unusal courage in the midst of any severe misfortune whatever.

Full of this noble confidence, she sought whatever was most difficult in the practice of virtue, and in her accustomed works of religion, piety, or charity towards others, always chose the most difficult path, or the most laborious means of doing them. Nay, she often prayed the Most High to afflict her with all those evils from which she saw her neighbours suffering; so that her spirit seemed capable of suffering them with the greatest resignation. Her confidence in God's help, was that which inspired her with such courage and strength; because fear is a sign of a weak and distrustful soul, while the virtue of hope, which is certain of succeeding in the most arduous enterprises, is accompanied by magnanimity, which tends to undertake what is difficult. Hence we can perceive the reason why Agnes never feared any of the suggestions of the malignant tempter, who seeks indirectly and by many wiles to entice incautious souls to transgress the law. We have reason to conclude that he very seldom tried his strength against this virgin's heroism; and we know for certain that the number of her victories corresponds to that of his

assaults. Perhaps he sought to revenge his discomfiture by molesting the imagination of some of the religious women who fought for Jesus Christ under Agnes's direction. Her extreme solicitude for the peace of their souls, had made her beg them to confide their interior combats with openness to her, in the hope that this humble confidence would be a powerful remedy against the attacks of the tempter. She found that every time that a timid conscience applied to her for comfort and counsel in the midst of its conflicts, she succeeded in restoring the calm which seemed to have vanished entirely. While Agnes praised the Most High for this, she could hardly contain her joy, because she found that not only she herself overcame all the stratagems of the evil powers, but that God's consecrated virgins, who were under her care were a happy flock, whose blessed fold was not to be penetrated by any enemy. Perhaps the devil, who does not give up his ground so easily, changed his plan of attack, as we are told by the writers of that time, and not being able to disturb their consciences, began to assail the quiet of the monastery, with unaccustomed noises, especially during the hours of night-prayer, and their common repose. This last phantom was repulsed by Agnes, who convoked her religious together every evening, and blessed them in the name of God, and then sent them away, telling them to go securely to sleep, encouraging them with these words of Psalm 120, "Non dormitabit neque dormiet, qui custodit Israel." "He shall neither slumber nor sleep,

that keepeth Israel." It was always Agnes's business to repress the assaults of the devils, and the power which heaven had communicated to her words, to her advice, and to her prayers, shone out most brilliantly in this matter.

It was not long before she found herself again required to fight with and overcome the enemy of the human race. There was a man who showed every sign of being possessed by a devil. It is true that we are ignorant of many terrible consequences of physical derangement, and that experience and observation have destroyed many prejudices, and have proved that what has been often ascribed to diabolic agency, was caused only by natural illness, and ceased as soon as the transports of delirium were over; but it is undeniable, on the other hand, that the Church furnishes us with experiments by which we may test the reality of diabolical possession. This empire over the body, which God sometimes allows to devils, is shown by indisputable evidence in the revealed Scriptures, and by examples in every age. The unhappy man of whom we speak, was in punishment for his past sins, or as a trial of his patience, subject to the fierce attacks of a devil. He was taken to the monastery to be cured by Agnes, and he had scarce set his foot in it, when, by a sudden access of fury he broke his bonds, and running madly about the cloister, fell in with a young girl who was a postulant there. He seized her, and was hurrying to the well in order to drown her, but in this critical moment Agnes arrived. She placed herself courageously before

him and freed the girl from the imminent danger she was in. The maniac did not resist, but shuddering like one who stifles his rage, stopped short, looking at her with surly eyes. She raised her faith, made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and placed her hands on his head while she recited the symbol of St. Athanasius. Before she had finished it the evil spirit went out of him, leaving him entirely free, but very weak from the effect of his past agitation. The eyes of his benumbed mind were suddenly opened, and his feelings roused by the greatness of the evil he had suffered, and nothing remained but to express his thankfulness to his courteous deliverer. She replied by exhorting him to be grateful to God's mercy, to show his gratitude by his holy life. This miracle created as much astonishment as it deserved, and Agnes was always applied to in public distresses. Every body believed that her prayers were an infallible remedy for them: but she was not less anxious to escape from the crowds that came to visit her. Her charity made her on the one hand unwilling to refuse their prayers, but she had strong reasons on the other for feeling an extreme repugnance to appearing before men, and becoming the object of their praise. The life of Agnes was isolated, she placed her whole happiness in God, she fled from every breath of human ambition, and considered every moment of this present life as an unhappy drawback, which kept her from reaching her heavenly country; and she always kept the perils, snares, and natural inconstancy of men

before her eyes. Thus it is not to be wondered at, that, the more her works made her great before men, the more she buried herself in her own humility. Perhaps it suggested to her the way to escape from public applause by flying as much as possible from the conversation of strangers, but how could she prevent her religious from admiring her, if she displayed more than once before their eyes that power, which, with the help of God's omnipotence, breaks through the confines of the ordinary laws of nature?

One of those virgins suffered from a severe ophthalmia, which defied all the art of medicine, and at last deprived her of sight. Mite, as the patient was called, inconsolable for her blindness, begged Agnes to obtain some relief for her by her prayers. The saint said to her one day, "If you will promise to God never more to shed a tear from those eyes for whatever temporal misfortunes may happen to you, and to consecrate all your affections to Him, weaned from all earthly care, I promise you on His part the consolation of recovering the perfect use of your eyes."

The way in which Agnes foresaw and foretold this prodigy increases the wonder of it, and gives us greater insight into the nature of the fact, and it shows us the action of Divine omnipotence which moves the creature to become an instrument of its portents. In such cases there is a certain similarity between the state of the spirit of one who obtains the gift of prophecy, and of one who is enriched with the power of working

miracles. As the mind of the prophet is inspired from above with the knowledge of what it could never learn by ordinary means, so the mind of the thaumaturgus feels moved to perform some action which produces a miraculous effect, the result of the interference of Divine power, the author of all portents. Sometimes this power follows upon prayer, as we read of St. Peter praying before he recalled Tabitha to life;* sometimes it appears without any prayer being made, as when St. Peter punished the false and interested conduct of Ananias and Sapphira with a sudden death.† For this reason St. Gregory says that saints sometimes work miracles by power, and at other times by prayer. In both, God is the principal actor, whether He makes use of the words, or the actions, or the interior movements of man, or of any other created instrument; so that the power which He communicates to His creatures makes it almost seem as if He obeyed their voice, according to the expression of Scripture, "The Lord obeying the voice of a man."‡

The Most High was pleased frequently to magnify His servant Agnes by similar signs. The following circumstance is well worthy of being remembered. The nuns who lived under Agnes' direction came to her one day to tell her that there was no more bread in the monastery, nor had they any means of procuring enough to support them all. Agnes listened to them

* Acts ix. † Acts v. ‡ Josue x. 14.

without giving any signs of diffidence or sadness, and said with a smile, to encourage them, "Nothing is impossible to God." In a few minutes a person unknown to all arrived at the monastery and brought them a few small loaves. The relief seemed very inadequate to their wants, but when Agnes had blessed them they multiplied and increased to such a degree, that a large portion remained, after they had all eaten enough, to their great astonishment. As we learn from the Gospel what is the virtue and power of a soul which does not admit the slightest perplexity to interfere with the strong life of its faith, we are not at all surprised at this miracle, the account of which, given us by the most genuine records, is confirmed by an authority which no one who considers it seriously can doubt for a moment. It is universally known, even in the age of the most enlightened criticism, what esteem and veneration are due to the writings of St. Catherine of Sienna, who will be admirable in every age, for God enriched her with wisdom which could only have flowed from a heavenly fountain. In one of her celebrated ecstasies the saint heard this fact from the mouth of her Divine Spouse, when He spoke to her of God's especial providence for His servants. For the satisfaction of the reader we give the very words, as they are reported by the saint.*

"Sometimes I provide for their wants, by multiplying a small quantity of provisions which

* "Opere di Sta. Caterina raccolte da G. Gigli," printed in Sienna, 1707. Chap. 149. pag. 279.

are not sufficient, as thou knowest of that sweet virgin saint Agnes. From her childhood to the end she served me with true humility, and firm hope. For she never thought with doubt about herself, or her household. Wherefore with living faith she began poor, and without any temporal property, to build the monastery at the command of Mary. Thou knowest that it was the haunt of sinners; she never thought, how can I do this; but she worked with my providence, and made it a holy place, and a fit monastery for religious. And in it she collected at first about eighteen young virgins, without having anything, except what I provided for her. Among the rest I supported them for three days when they had only herbs, and no bread.

"And if thou shouldest ask, why didst Thou keep her in such want? For Thou hast told me that Thou dost never fail Thy servants who hope in Thee, and that they never suffer any necessity; whereas it seems to me that they were in want of what was necessary, because ordinarily, and speaking of those who are not perfect, the body of the creature cannot live upon herbs alone; and if Agnes herself was perfect, the others were not in such a perfect state. I should reply that I did this and permitted it in order to inebriate her with my Providence, and that those who were yet imperfect, should, by the miracle which followed, have occasion to make their beginning and foundation in the light of the most holy faith. In those herbs, or in another similar case to this, I gave and can give

to the human body such a quality that it will be better supported by those few herbs, and sometimes by no food at all, than it was before by bread, and other nourishment, which is given and ordained to preserve the life of man: and this thou knowest for thou hast experienced it thyself. I say that I provide by multiplying: for having been, as I have said, that space of time without bread, casting the eyes of her mind by the light of faith on me, she said, 'My Father and my Lord, my eternal Spouse, and hast Thou made me take these daughters out of their fathers' houses to perish with hunger? Provide, O Lord, for their necessities.' Then I extended my Providence over that which, as well as her mind, stood before me, and I obliged a creature by a mental inspiration to bring her five small loaves; and I showed them to her mind, wherefore she said, turning to the sisters, 'Go, my daughters, to answer a call at the grate, and take that bread.' They brought it and sat down to table, and I gave her so much virtue in breaking the bread, that they were all fully satisfied, and afterwards took so much from the table, that it abundantly sufficed a second time to their corporal necessities."

It must be evident to all how the truth of the prodigy is certified by this testimony, which we consider an ornament to this life, while at the same time it brings out the tender and firm trust in God's help, which animated the heart of Agnes in her undertakings.

Encouraged by such free displays of the Divine

bounty, she communicated her spirit of faith to her sisters. How could those pious nuns resist the force of her example, when it was clear how tenderly God assisted their dear superioress. She was extremely eager for their spiritual advancement, and employed every means of preventing them from being weakened by tepidity. A long and complete experience, most discriminating judgment, and a special light from Heaven, were her guides in the delicate ministry of preventing her religious from being wearied or ensnared, while they pursued their career of religious perfection.

When a young woman who was determined to leave the world, came to ask to be received there to the monastic life, Agnes employed all her penetration to discover her disposition, and the motives which led her to this action; reminding herself, that not the inconsiderate wish of increasing her family, but the desire of finding true and faithful spouses of Jesus Christ, was to be her only end in admitting any one to the life of the cloister. She was extremely anxious, above all, that those whom she received into her monastery, should rightly understand how great is the happiness of those who are able to detach themselves completely from the world; and, on the contrary, how dangerous and deplorable is the lot of those who, having separated themselves from it by their dress, still continue to love its yoke and its precepts. She congratulated herself as if she had made a great acquisition when she succeeded in making any one understand the religious life.

This life should never be embraced as an expedient, or from weariness, or from a little-minded piety, but must be the result of generous devotion, superior to all earthly views. All men are not able to follow the world, because all have not the strength, the means, and the riches to do what the world requires of them, but all may think that they are able to fly from the world. This flight will be but a pretence, and of small value in the eyes of the Searcher of hearts, if it is accompanied with a kind of regret for having renounced all earthly pomp. It is therefore necessary, to prevent ourselves from inconsiderately losing some of the merits of our sacrifice, to consider it a special favour of God to have been chosen for the most beloved part of His flock. One thing have I asked of the Lord; this will I seek after as one of the greatest blessings, said David, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; and such were the desires of our Agnes.

The diligent care to make discipline and the spirit of perfection flourish in her monastery, never failed to produce the desired effects. She could see them in the fervour of her companions, and she felt the most unspeakable joy and consolation when she thanked God for this success. This joyful state of mind was, for higher reasons, proved by hard trials. Agnes loved her God, and she had, like the just in every age, to resist in the trial of afflictions. She was warned of their coming in a most distinct manner by a vision. One Sunday, at the dawn of day when she was in

prayer, an angel appeared to her, and said, "Follow me, for I have to show thee a great mystery." Agnes followed the footsteps of God's messenger without a moment's delay. He went into the garden of the monastery, and stopped under an olive tree, then he turned to Agnes, and gave her a cup filled with a most bitter liquid, which he imperiously commanded her to drink to the last drop; "Because this," said he, "will make thee in some degree like the Redeemer of the human race, who in the Garden of Gethsemane did not disdain for thy salvation to accept a cup of immense sorrow from the hand of His Heavenly Father, and to submit voluntarily to inexplicable sufferings." Having said this he disappeared, but for nine following Sundays the same symbolical vision was renewed, and he repeated the same thing to her. It is most common in the lives of the prophets and saints, to find that God revealed to them with proportionate signs, things that were going to occupy a remarkable part of their lives; in order that, having foreseen them, they may prepare to endure them with magnanimity and intrepidity. It is enough to look at Jeremias and Isaias only, to see under how many symbols certain terrible misfortunes, which would call for an extraordinary degree of constancy, were shadowed forth to them by Heaven. The sheet filled with unclean and frightful animals presented to the apostle St. Peter, showed him how much he had to suffer in preaching the Gospel. Agnes was not slow to imagine the signification of these presages, and it would be

difficult to describe the alacrity of mind, and the fervent prayers with which she prepared herself to undergo the troubles which had been announced to her. In her anxiety to resemble in some degree her suffering Spouse in the Passion which He endured, she went so far as to entreat Him to make His hand heavy upon her, and to help her with His strong arm to become a perfect victim of love, through the most severe trials. She passed whole hours before the image of her crucified Redeemer, and while she went over in her mind the various ways by which divine love had entered to take possession of her soul, she said to herself, that as love had flowers, according to that saying,* "the flowers have appeared in our land," and that it also had wounds, which express sufferings, as is shown by many passages of the Holy Scriptures, she sought to choose for herself the wounds, in order that the energy of her love might make her like her only good, who was loaded and covered with them.

Her wishes were not disappointed. In a short time her strength failed very greatly, and she was soon reduced to such a state of weakness, that she expected to die. Such was, however, her courage and patience, that she concealed her pains and sufferings from her companions for a long time. Besides having the same placid expression of countenance, and observing all her religious duties, she continued to practise all her accustomed mortifications. The vigour of her

* Canticle, ii, 12.

spirit communicated its strength to her body, which was wasted by a painful and tedious illness, but at last this made such progress, that Agnes was obliged to have recourse to the physician's assistance. Her unvarying tranquillity never failed in all the sufferings of her illness, and in making use of whatever remedies were prescribed. The accomplishment of God's will was the only thing she was not indifferent to. As the medical men could not do her any good, they thought it best to send her to the baths of Chianciano, in hopes that the waters there, which are provided by nature with beneficial properties, would do her much good. Although Agnes had an interior conviction that the remainder of her life was to be passed in sufferings, she humbly agreed to do the will of others. She went to Chianciano, and observed most accurately the rules prescribed by the doctors; and she was the only one who showed no impatience, or fear, or surprise, at seeing that her illness grew worse and worse, and even joyfully encouraged the nuns and her confessor, a Dominican who had accompanied her, and were grieved to see the greatness of her sufferings. Whatever state the body may be in, if the soul knows how to rely without wavering on the dispositions of the Sovereign Mover of the world, who arranges all things for our good, it is always contented and tranquil. There were only two lines of conduct open to Agnes; the first was most meritorious, and conformable to the will of God; the second was lawful and plausible, but in it some earthly views might enter, and make it a

path which led away from holiness. The first was to suffer with unwearied resignation, without asking for relief; the second was to pray that God would condescend to restore her to health for His glory. Agnes only knew the shortest and the best ways of proving her fidelity to God.

If the Most High was pleased to prepare new crowns for her by this most painful way, He was also pleased to make her at this time a theatre of miracles, which showed clearly how great His goodness ever was to His servant. Once when she was on the point of entering the bath, a pure white manna fell from heaven, which covered the waters and the adjacent ground. The clear blue sky of that summer season made it impossible to mistake the manna for snow. While those who were there were collecting this manna in astonishment, they perceived a spring of fresh and bubbling water issuing from one side of the bath where there had been none before. Though this was not a supernatural event, its appearance at that moment made those people believe that, through the merits of Agnes, God had opened a new spring, and had given it an extraordinary power of healing the diseases of those who used it with faith. The result corresponded to their expectations, and the bath retained for the future the name of her who had left such a venerated memory, and was called the waters of St. Agnes.

The careful narratives of that period, which have been transmitted to posterity, relate many facts of her stay in Chianciano much more extraordinary than that. The power of her prayers

made her universally venerated, and her touch instantaneously cured a child who had made a bad wound in her knee by trying to cut a loaf upon it. Her blessing changed some vases of water into excellent wine, for the relief of some devout persons who were at table with her. But the following circumstance deserves above all to be mentioned, for the raising of the dead to life is a portent capable of confounding all the human reasonings of those who eternally doubt what is the essential character of a true miracle.

A little child who was playing at the edge of the bath, fell by accident into the water, and as there was no one by to give him any help, he was drowned, and his dead body was afterwards found floating upon the surface of the water. Our Agnes was moved to compassion by the tears of his mother, and, guided by inspiration, took the dead child in her arms into a solitary place, and made a long prayer. She joyfully returned to the crowd who were anxiously wondering what would happen, and laid the corpse down near the mother, then taking it by the hand, she raised it from the ground alive and full of the most flourishing health, and restored it to her who wept for its too early death.

Although we must not be too hasty in pronouncing that those who have fallen into the water are dead, and means have been discovered in modern times of restoring them to the use of their senses, which were before unknown, yet if they are left for any length of time in the water, or if the means of recovery are not adopted with

great speed, the accident is quite certain to terminate fatally. Such was the case of the child of whom we are speaking, and, indeed, all the circumstances of his misfortune, and his being delivered, prove that he had really lost his life, and recovered it miraculously through Agnes's means.

These miracles were considered by all as signs and wonders of God's bounty, and the extraordinary virtue which they perceived at the same time in Agnes, made her universally looked up to. She profited by their favourable dispositions towards her to promote the glory of God, to show them the deformity and evil consequences of vice, and to inspire desire for the unseen treasures of heaven. Probably, her words and her conduct, full of zeal, were annoying to the profligacy of some few, because the words of the just are a sharp dart which poisons and disturbs the false peace of the wicked. However that might be, it pleased God to give her an occasion to exercise the virtue of patience, which St. Gregory considers not inferior to that of working miracles. Every time that Agnes went to the bath, she was followed by some young men who ridiculed and laughed at her, and this scene continued for several days. She kept silence, but her modesty was not enough to check their violence. As soon as this became known in Chianciano, where Agnes was held in profound respect, it was decided to correct the impudence of these bad youths by a severe punishment. They, however, found a loving mediatrix in Agnes herself, and she employed

all her influence to protect them from any punishment. She even considered herself much obliged to them for having given her an opportunity to suffer reproach for the love of God, and one day when she returned to her lodging, she took the best part of her own dinner, and sent it to them as a present. They were still more confused and astonished at this further display of charity and benevolence, and took every pains to correct their fault, and went humbly to Agnes to assure her of their repentance. She received them in the most obliging manner, and employed all the time they were with her, in giving them animated and useful instructions about a Christian life. Whenever she was afterwards interrogated about this circumstance, she spoke of them as if they had been her greatest benefactors, and praised their docility in coming to ask her pardon for an occurrence in which they had committed no fault, but that of saying a few words which they really believed to be true, from a mere excusable want of consideration. The true spirit of Christian meekness has no other way of thinking about injuries and wrongs.

Agnes had now passed some months at Chianciano, and the doctors vainly hoped that the waters, and a less mountainous climate, would do her some good. But, perceiving that it was hopeless to expect any improvement in her health, she returned to her monastery at Montepulciano. She had been absent with pain from this peaceful home, where she hoped to end the days of her earthly pilgrimage. Every place is for the just, a

temple, where he may find his God, a harbour, where he may repose in all security, and a ladder, which he can mount to reach his end, but a place which was the theatre of the most remarkable events of her life is always dear to a pious soul. The remainder of Agnes's days, which were days of suffering and trial for her body, were made remarkable by her unwearied fervour. As if she had done no good before, she presented herself in her assiduous prayers to God, as a victim of infinite imperfection, hoping to undergo the most painful trials in order to glorify Him, and to give Him a part of that satisfaction which it was impossible to pay entirely. She meditated continually on the passion of her Divine Redeemer, and thus she kindled new ardour, and found fresh grounds for her compunction, for her hope, and for her love. She was never weary of weeping for the sins of ungrateful men, and would have wished to make herself a fence to stop the course of them, at the cost of any imaginable torment. So deeply was she impressed by reflecting on the connection of the vices, and the prodigious ramification of their poisonous roots, that she regarded this earth as an infected spot, from which it is desirable to be released. Hence her anxiety to join herself by love to her uncreated God increased, and she stirred up her fervour and her anxiety to honour Him by the highest acts which religion and fervour could suggest. This was particularly the case when she approached, as she very frequently did, the sacraments of penance and of the holy eucharist. It was enough to cast

one glance at her face, to see upon what flames of charity that soul lived and fed, to whom living for God was a treasure, and death was gain.

The light of prophecy which Agnes received from God, especially towards the end of her life, was a manifest sign of what great privileges she enjoyed. She knew everything that interiorly passed in the consciences of her religious daughters, and corrected them for their most hidden faults, so they took care to guard themselves even from wandering thoughts, knowing that nothing was unknown to their dear mother and superioress. Agnes sweetened her reproofs with such winning and courteous manners, and such useful advice, that they were much pleased at their interior faults falling under such enlightened and judicious eyes. Agnes gave some wonderful proofs of her extraordinary foresight, in prophesying their future lot to many people, which predictions were all justified by the event. On this subject we are told, that once when some citizens who feared God begged her to pray for mercy for their common country, which was menaced with great evils by the rising discords between some of the powerful families; she convoked her nuns and began to pray with them before a picture of the Mother of God. While they made supplication to avert the dreaded scourge, they all saw, without mistake, that our Lady's face changed colour, grew pale, and frowned, and at last broke into sweat and tears, like one who suffers from terror and grief. The pious virgins were motionless with fear, but Agnes said, sighing

deeply, "Redouble your prayers to the Most High, my daughters, for this is the time to seek His mercy; the wrath of heaven will not bear to be delayed any longer; and the signs of grief and sorrow on this holy picture are warnings of the woes which hang over our dear country, and many other cities of Italy." This speech was considered with reason as a prophecy of what was to happen in the following years. Agnes must have felt double grief in prophesying this calamity, for she was most sensible to the misfortunes of her neighbours, and knowing that she was shortly to leave this earth, it must have pained her to bequeath such evil predictions to her country at the end of her life.

Worn out at length by illness, she was obliged to yield to her weakness, and remained in bed. She had never been observed to be so joyful as she was when her life was despaired of. The burning desire of a better good had long occupied all her spirit, and made her anxious to hasten the moment of her passage. Her words showed the joy of her mind, and she exulted like one whose foot is on the threshold of a kingdom he has long desired. When the gift of perseverance is granted to a just soul it knows the fate of a moment, which includes in itself all the preparations of its happy predestination. The river of death brings unutterable sweetness and comforts to the just, for on its joyful banks they await a passage which is to end in an ocean of eternal bliss. Agnes thought in that moment of nothing but consuming herself in continual acts of faith

and charity: her hope suggested all the rest. She only asked for the holy sacraments. Afterwards seeing that her spiritual daughters wept without comfort for her approaching loss. "What," said she, "do you not love me enough to rejoice when you see that I am soon to go to God, who is the only end for which all creatures were made." When she heard their answer, that they were sad because they had to remain like a forsaken flock, deprived of such a faithful guide, she answered, "Do not be afraid of losing my assistance, I shall be your mother, your companion, and your sister, whenever in your wants you call on me to be so." She then cast her eyes to heaven and said most joyfully, "I go to Him who is my only hope." These were her last words. She died in the forty-ninth year of her age, on Tuesday night, the 20th of April, 1317.

The praises of Agnes ought to follow the history of her actions, and the kind of sanctity in which she shone would give us ample materials for it. But we think that the precise account of facts ought to be the only and the most legitimate praise required of an historian. All that we could add would only raise a suspicion of our having wished to give glory to our subject by borrowed artifices. Long declamations belong to the funerals of those who only were called virtuous by the voice of flattery. The death of the saints is precious in the sight of God, and is ornamented with such a kind of glory that God generally works miracles to make it shine wonderfully even before the eyes of men. So He acted with re-

spect to Agnes. A few moments after she had exchanged her earthly for a heavenly habitation, many young children woke at midnight, and began suddenly to cry out, "Agnes is dead! the saint is dead!" At that very moment she manifested herself in the act of flying up to heaven to a poor and pious woman who had been long ill, and told her to go to the monastery and place her arm, which was ulcerated, upon her corpse, for it would cure it. The woman obeyed, and the result justified her confidence. When the news of her death was thus spread in Montepulciano, extraordinary crowds came to venerate her honoured remains. A sweet fragrance issued from them, which was perceptible to all, and only vanished after a long series of years. The Dominican Fathers of Orvieto, who were summoned for that purpose by the nuns, celebrated the ordinary funeral rites, and the body of the glorious virgin remained exposed in its religious dress, to satisfy the piety of the people. They intended to preserve it from decomposition by embalming it, and sent to Genoa and to other towns to procure the most powerful unguents, but there issued unexpectedly from the hands and feet of the virginal corpse a quantity of liquid resembling melted gum, which was found on examination to be a most precious balm. They then entirely abandoned their intention of using any human means of preserving it. When it was published that this venerated body was about to be buried, all the young girls of the town made a subscription among themselves,

without its being suggested to them by anybody, and brought many wax candles, which they carried at her funeral, to give this last token of their love for their countrywoman. The Poliziani were much struck by this pious and grateful thought, and it was enacted in their ancient statutes that every year on the 1st of May all the great people should come to offer a wax torch weighing fifteen pounds, and that all the governors of the surrounding places should bring lighted candles. This offering was commuted in the course of time to the payment of fifty *lire*, and one hundred more as an alms, it was afterwards reduced to twenty-five *lire*, and is at present thirty-three.

The body of the saint was honourably placed in a wooden case, ornamented after the fashion of a sepulchral urn, which could be opened when it was thought fit, and was placed in a convenient place for the people who came to venerate these holy relics. They were juridically proved to be the true ones at different times. In 1554 they were removed to the cathedral to preserve them from being taken by the Siennese, who were devastating the territory of the Poliziani, and it is said that they returned without human assistance to their former church. In the year 1601 the body was solemnly ornamented with new and rich vestments, and laid in a shrine of walnut, most beautifully sculptured. Finally, when the marble altar which exists at present was finished, in 1690 the body was placed upon it, shut up in a shrine, which a uniform tradition gives us

reason for believing, also contains some valuable relics, viz., a small vase of balsam which flowed from the saint's dead body; the little cross which she took from the neck of the Infant Jesus, and another small vase full of the manna which fell miraculously from above. The present sacristy was the room where she lived for many years, and whence she was called to enjoy her immortal reward, when she left this dangerous banishment. The graces God gave to the devout persons who went to implore her intercession, especially in the times which immediately followed her happy death, were innumerable. It is not necessary for us to make a catalogue of these miracles, as that has been accurately done by other writers. We will only relate that Agnes once appeared to a man who was waiting in arms on the road from Montepulciano to Montechiello for an enemy, on whom he meant to revenge himself by his death; and he fell down half dead, nor was he able to move until he had promised Agnes, who, accompanied by an angel, reproved him for his guilty and murderous design, to forgive all injuries, and to reconcile himself sincerely with his rival.

SECTION III.

The body of our saint sweats blood.—Seditions in Montepulciano.—Fresh tumults in the city.—Arrival of the Emperor Charles IV. in Italy.—This prince visits St. Agnes.

Bernardo Guidonis.—Revelation of the glory she enjoys in heaven. St. Catherine of Sienna goes to visit her shrine.—The homage to our saint is confirmed and spread.

THE fame of Agnes' sanctity spread still more on all sides. It seemed as if her spirit still animated her members, and was touched by the prayers of the people. We are told that when the shrine was once opened at a time of public need, to expose the sacred body to the veneration of the faithful, a thousand eyes saw it sweat blood. But as some people were slow to believe this prodigy, it was renewed on Easter Day in the presence of a most numerous audience. This was a presage of terrible calamities. In fact, from the year 1352 there had been some serious quarrels which kept the people in a great state of agitation. Jacopo and Niccolò, of the family of del Pecora, or de' Cavalieri, were at strife, because the former wished to become the tyrant of his country, and the latter aspired to the honour of defending it. Pietro Sacconi, who had made himself master of Arezzo, had suggested this ambitious design to Jacopo. Niccolò found out the plot, and their mutual jealousy broke out. The quarrel had to be decided by main force. Niccolò in the meantime assembled the

greater portion of the people, and unfolded to them all the treasonable conspiracy, exhorting them with the utmost vehemence to be on their guard, and to prevent all danger by expelling Jacopo and his supporters. Jacopo's fury was increased by this, and he returned in November of the same year under the walls of his native town which had banished him. He brought with him a large body of armed men, who were given him by Visconti, Archbishop of Milan. In the dead of night he contrived to break down one of the gates, and corrupted the sentinels with money, so that he entered without resistance, and took possession of some of the most important posts. Fortune did not favour his next attempts. When Niccolò learnt what had happened, he hastened with several companions to surround the enemies; a fierce battle ensued, in which both sides fought with fury. At last Jacopo was obliged to give up all his advantages, and to take a hasty flight. He went to Sienna, where he found a friendly shelter without much difficulty. Their kind reception of him gave rise to suspicions lest the Siennese should intrigue in favour of his tyrannical designs. Therefore, policy, which is always ready to adopt a crooked course, suggested to the Poliziani to make an alliance with the people of Perugia, so as to have a resource if attacked. This league was a great offence in the eyes of the Siennese, and their army invested Montepulciano. When they measured their strength, however, they found that it would not be easy to complete their enterprise, and they

sent to request some troops from the commonwealth of Florence. They were refused, but the Florentines exerted themselves to set on foot a treaty for peace. The Perugians also entered into these amicable dispositions, and withdrew the troops which they had sent to help the Poliziani, thus taking from the Siennese one of their grounds for hostility, and proposed a plausible arrangement. Peace was thus concluded between all the parties, on condition that Montepulciano should be free to govern itself, but that the Republic of Sienna should keep a garrison there for twenty years, who were only to have the keeping of one gate and one of the bells of the city. With respect to Niccolò and Jacopo dei Cavalieri it was stipulated in the same treaty, that the Republic of Sienna should grant 6,000 florins to the former, as a reimbursement for the expenses he had undergone during the war, and a total immunity from taxes for ten years; and the community of Montepulciano was charged with the payment of 3,000 florins of gold to the second, and the restitution of all his hereditary property. The convention was signed on the 15th of May, 1353, and the commonwealths of Florence and of Perugia were responsible for its execution.

But the next year, for some reason or other, the peace was again disturbed. In order to exempt themselves from the payment of the 6,000 florins the Siennese banished Niccolò dei Cavalieri, declaring him an enemy of the state. The ambassadors of Florence and Perugia complained

loudly of this injustice, and Villani says that they met with ill-treatment instead of attention. In the meantime Niccolò intrigued with his friends in Montepulciano, and when the Siennese garrison in the citadel least expected it, he threw himself into the town with two hundred horse, and five hundred foot soldiers. The Siennese, however, defended themselves gallantly, and reduced Niccolò to the utmost distress, having killed the greatest part of his troops. Not knowing what to do, he adopted the worst possible course, which his despair suggested to him, and set fire to his native town, and took to flight. The fire spread to a great number of houses, and as it was difficult to extinguish it in that tumult, it burnt all that part of the city which lay below the citadel, and the author of the mischief was able to escape unobserved in the general confusion. He had an interview with his brother after this flight, and as they were both wearied out by so many misfortunes, they agreed to be perfectly reconciled to each other, for fear of ruining their family for ever. The same spirit of peaceful reflection, produced by horror of the consequences of war, had also sprung up in many of the cities of Lombardy and of Tuscany, though these cities were always fighting and never reconciled to each other. Therefore, in common with the aristocracies of Venice, Verona, Padua, Mantua, and Ferrara, who were jealous of the excessive power of the Visconti of Milan, they supplicated the Emperor Charles IV. king of Bohemia and Duke of Luxem-

bourg,* to come to Italy, that they might have a mediator with enough authority to make himself respected and to guarantee their rights. In the same year, 1354, this monarch yielded to the entreaties of so many people, whose intestine discords, jealousy, and ambition had obliged them to seek the assistance of a foreigner. He gave his attention to setting in order the most serious affairs, and saw Jacopo and Niccolò dei Cavalieri in Sienna, who managed to plead their cause so well, that the Emperor placed them at the head of the government of Montepulciano, and to honour them still more took them with him to Rome in the following year, 1355.

Before leaving Tuscany, in the month of April 1355, Charles went to Montepulciano, which he had enriched with singular privileges,† on purpose to visit the relics of our Saint Agnes. As he approached the honoured shrine, full of faith and piety, accompanied by his highest officers, the dead saint opened her eyes, and fixed them with a living sweet expression on the pious emperor. This miracle touched his heart so deeply that he was never satisfied with giving signs of his religious tenderness towards Agnes. When he left the church where she reposed, he gave the richest decorations to it, which it was subsequently thought fit to sell, to provide for some pressing want. A manuscript appendix, which

* It was related of this emperor that he ruined his house in order to gain the empire, and then ruined the empire in order to re-establish his house.

† See the book of the copy of the Archives of the Commonwealth.

is attributed to Vincenzio Marotta Giffonese, doctor of laws, himself the author of a Life of the saint, written in hexameter and pentameter verse, and is kept with the original parchment of the Blessed Raymond, assures us of the truth of this fact, and produces incontrovertible witnesses. The devotion of Charles IV. to St. Agnes during the remainder of his life was remarkable, as well as his affection for her country, and the love he bore to the Order of St. Dominic, which is proved by the two edicts which he addressed to the General Chapter of the Friars Preachers, held at Prague by his request, and at which he assisted in person. These marks of benevolence were consonant to the generous nature of that prince, who rejoiced, as he himself said, to see the calumny destroyed, which imputed the death of his grandfather the emperor Henry in 1314, to his having been poisoned with the Host consecrated by Father Bernardo da Montepulciano, called Fra Bernardo Guidonis, a religious of that order. Charles IV. had investigated the matter to ascertain the exact truth, before the passing of time could make it difficult to collect all the evidence. Fra Bernardo, who perhaps belonged to the family of the Cavalieri, was very far from having deserved such a horrible accusation; he had on the contrary, an uncommon reputation for soundness of doctrine and holiness of life. He filled many honourable posts in his order, and enjoyed the esteem of the greatest men of his age. It is true that many authors have adopted the fable of the poison, but the wise

critic should not allow the number of writers to have any weight against more sure evidence, especially when it is known that they all copied each other. Many cardinals and prelates, who were the most attached to the Emperor Henry, wrote justifications of Fra Bernardo, and the Apology entitled, *Ad Prælatos Alemaniæ super assertionem innocentiæ Fratris Bernardi de Monte Politiano;* or, To the Prelates of Germany in assertion of the innocence of Brother Bernard of Montepulciano.

The Providence of Heaven seemed to employ itself in manifesting to mankind how dear and acceptable the intercession of His servant Agnes was to the Most High, by the continual wonders which it worked at her tomb. The height of glory to which this illustrious virgin was raised in the kingdom of the blessed is much above our comprehension, but we can notwithstanding relate a fact which will open a field of sublime meditations to the pious reader. Saint Catherine of Sienna assures us that one day when she was rapt in spirit, she beheld our Agnes seated on a lofty throne of most beauteous light, and an empty throne near her, which was reserved for a soul of equal merit. A humble desire of knowing for whom that vacant seat was prepared, made Catherine beseech the Lord to signify it to her, and she understood at that moment, that she herself was to reign in heaven in equal glory with Agnes. This vision increased the tender devotion which Catherine had long felt for our saint. In her one hundred and seventy-seventh

letter which is addressed to the prioress of the Dominican nuns of Montepulciano, she gives such a vivid picture of the virtues of Agnes, and represents so strongly the noble disposition of her mind, her love of God, her humility, and her attachment to the most sublime rules of heroic perfection, that her letter is an exact and minute account of her, and may take the place of any praise, however great. She was not satisfied with the just praise in her writings, and went herself to Montepulciano to venerate her body. Here, when she was in prayer before it, as she bent down to kiss her foot, Agnes prevented her from stooping by raising her foot, as a sign of affection. Some writers assert that, instead of raising her foot, she withdrew it, as if she would not suffer Catherine to humble herself before her. However that might be, it is universally allowed that she moved her foot, which caused great wonder in the minds of the spectators. The feelings of wonder and affection with which Catherine went away, brought her back to Montepulciano from Sienna her native place in a short time. During this second visit she once placed herself near the head of Agnes with the intention of kissing the cheek, and as she stooped to do this, a shower of manna, like that we have previously described began to fall, and covered them both, and the dress of each was made white by this pure cloud, whose particles were all small crosses.

It is clear from what has been said that the homage paid to Agnes dated from the time of

her death. The abundant graces which those who were devout to her obtained, increased their veneration and confirmed the name of Saint which the people gave her. The title of the church of Santa Maria Novella was very nearly changed into that of St. Agnes. In 1532 Clement VII. approved her cultus, and gave permission to the church in Montepulciano to celebrate the office of their venerable countrywoman according to the ecclesiastical rite. Many other Pontiffs were also careful to promote her veneration among the faithful. St. Pius V. granted ample indulgences to those who should visit her sacred body. Gregory XIII. inserted her name in the Roman Martyrology, with the title of Saint. Besides approving the lessons for her feast, which was fixed on the 20th of April, Clement VIII., in a Brief addressed to Henry IV. king of France, which was issued at the request of Eleanor of Bourbon, aunt of the king, and prioress of the Dominican nuns of Prouille, near Fanjeaux, in the diocese of Toulouse, he granted permission to the whole Order of Preachers to celebrate an annual commemoration of her. Clement X. was particularly anxious to extend and revive a devotion towards Agnes throughout Christendom, as we gather from his Brief of the 4th of April 1672. Finally, in a decree of the 12th of May, 1726, Benedict XIII. declared her worthy of solemn canonization.

THE LIFE

OF THE

BLESSED BENVENUTA OF BOJAN,

OF CIVIDALE AUSTRIA, IN THE PROVINCE OF FRIULI.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BIRTH, INFANCY, AND PIETY OF BENVENUTA. HER SISTER MARIA. HER MORTIFIED LIFE. HER VOW OF VIRGINITY. HER PARTICULAR DEVOTION TO ST. DOMINIC. FATHER CONRAD, HER CONFESSOR.

A pious virgin was born in Cividale of Austria, in Friuli, of devout and wealthy parents, on the 4th of May, which was the day of St. Florian, and observed as the feast of our Lord's crown of thorns by the Order of Preachers. Her birth was at first hidden from her father, no one daring to tell him that it was a girl, lest he should be angry, for he had already six daughters and no son. But he charged the attendants to tell him the truth without fear, and when he heard that his wife had brought forth a girl, he answered, with a loud and joyful voice, "She is welcome, and let her be called Benvenuta," which means welcome.

From her earliest years she never knew or thought of worldly comforts, and she began to seek without intermission the company of God and the angels and saints. Sometimes one of her sisters would curl and ornament her hair, that she might go to dances and other vain amusements of girlhood, but as soon as her sisters had left the room, she would take off all the ornaments, and putting on a veil instead, go to her private place of prayer, which she had chosen at the back of the house, in a wood lying in the direction of the church of the Blessed Virgin, which stands on the summit of a very high hill. The ground, which was profusely covered with herbage all round, had become flat and hard in this spot, like a well-trodden path, by reason of her constant genuflections. and the number of fatiguing prostrations which she used to make daily. When she was prevented by the weather, or any just cause, from finishing her daily prayers, she used to retire into her bed-room which she shared with one of her sisters named Maria, who was her companion in her vow of virginity, and with the door shut she used to pray to her Father in secret; and thus passing both the day and night in contemplation, in prayer, and watching, she led a life which was more angelic than human.

From her seventh to her twelfth year, she was in the habit of saying daily one hundred Our Fathers, and the same number of Hail Marys, in honour of the Holy Trinity; she also made one hundred prostrations in honour of the nativity

of our Lord, and the same number in honour of His resurrection. She said one thousand Hail Marys every day to the Blessed Virgin, and two thousand on Saturday. Moreover, on the Annunciation, which was her favourite feast, she used to say three thousand Hail Marys, and make fifty very fatiguing prostrations. She said one hundred Our Fathers and Hail Marys every day in honour of the angels, and the same number in honour of the patriarchs, of the martyrs, of the confessors, and also of the holy virgins, besides her fasts and abstinences.

When she was twelve years old, she put on sackcloth, which she wore for six years and a half. For two years she carried a chain beneath her clothes, and she similarly wore a rope round her waist, next the skin, which, by reason of her growth was buried in the flesh, and what distressed her more than the pain it occasioned, was the impossibility of extracting it without surgical operation, for she felt the greatest repugnance to disclosing this fact. She fled to prayer, which was her ordinary refuge, and begged God to help her in such distress. Then her spirit was raised above the body, as it very often happened, and after the spirit returned to the body she saw the rope not broken in any of its parts lying on the ground before her.

She made a vow of virginity to the Blessed Virgin when she once appeared to her, and took her for her lady and mistress, and the Blessed Virgin on her part, received her for her spiritual daughter. She made a similar agreement with St.

Dominic when he also appeared to her. Therefore, having learnt the abstinences, vigils, and mortifications of the blessed Dominic, she studied with all her heart how to conform her life to his. She drank no wine for ten years and more, and concealed her abstinence from it so dexterously, that her father and family never perceived it. He frequently thought he saw her drink wine when she took none, and she very often hid her portion of it. She also abstained from meat for a long time. She spent many whole nights, particularly those of the greatest feasts, in watching; and when she was nearly overcome by sleep, she used to put some vinegar into her eyes, to make it impossible for her to close them in sleep.

She used no bed for several years, but took a short repose on the bare ground, with a stone for a pillow, and spent the remainder of her time in contemplation and prayer.

In imitation of St. Dominic, she disciplined herself three times every night with an iron chain, but when in the course of time, her back had suffered too much from this practice, St. Dominic, who often appeared familiarly to her, said to her, in a vision, that she was to tell the state of the case to her confessor, Father Conrad, and be guided by his advice. But when she went to church the next day, with the intention of doing this, her timidity prevented her from saying anything to her confessor. St. Dominic reproved her in a second and a third vision, and told her to manifest the affair without delay to Father Conrad, and added, "You must know that it was

ordained by God that at this time you should be born, and he should enter the order of Preachers, so that by his counsels you might rule your life, and it shall prosper with you for his sake, and for yours he shall receive many blessings." Being thus compelled, she went to her confessor, and making a great effort, and shedding many tears, she told him all, and obeyed his directions. Father Conrad asked her to give him the chain, which he never returned to her, and forbade her ever again to discipline herself in a similar manner.

CHAPTER II.

HER FASTS AND HEAVENLY VISIONS. BENVENUTA FREQUENTS THE CHURCH OF ST. DOMINIC. SHE SHUNS DETRACTION. ILLUSIONS AND ASSAULTS OF THE DEVIL. HER PATIENCE, HER FORTITUDE, AND HER VICTORY.

In her tender age, before she was obliged to keep the fasts of the church, she began to fast through the whole of Lent, and the other Lent from Martinmas to Christmas; and in some years she observed these seasons with such rigour, that she only ate on alternate days bread and water, and meal broth on the remaining ones. She kept three fast days in all the weeks of the year, and some of them on bread and water, besides observing all the fasts of the Church.

She fled from the society of other girls, and indeed of all persons; she almost always remained at home, and most of her time was spent in the oratory in her bedroom. In the winter evenings, when her father and family amused themselves according to custom round the fire, she always refused to join in this domestic cheerfulness, and remained alone in her room to give herself to contemplation and prayer. Once when her father was by himself near the door of her room, having retired to finish the hours of the Blessed Virgin, which he was in the habit of saying daily, he heard voices within the room, as if she was conversing with other persons, and being anxious to know what she was doing, he opened her door, but he found her alone, and he said, in surprise, "Where are those persons with whom you were speaking just now?" She replied, "You can see yourself where they are." For as the door was opened, the three holy virgins, the blessed Catherine, Agnes, and Margaret, who had been conversing with her, disappeared, as her confessor said, to whom she subsequently related the event. And her father went away, silently wondering, and henceforward loved and reverenced her still more.

Her sister also, who slept in her room, said that sometimes she was awakened by hearing voices, as if she were talking with another person. And sometimes she saw a light shine, and said to her sister, "Benvenuta, can you see what this light is?" and Benvenuta would answer, "Go quietly to sleep, and do not think about it." The

father, who wrote this, was told by one of the servants of the house who had charge of the horses, that about the middle of the night, when he returned home with one of the horses, bringing a load of hay, as he passed through the court of the house, he saw such a strong light in the window of Benvenuta's room, that he should have thought the whole place was burning. When, however, he had laid down the hay, and put the horse in its stable, and came back from it, he could not see any light.

She went every morning to mass, and every evening to Compline, in the church of St. Dominic, which was about twice a stone's throw from her house, unless she was prevented by very bad weather or any great obstacle. When it was a festival, she anticipated the time, and went to Vespers, and she did not return home till Compline was over, for she received wonderful and great consolation during the Salve Regina. Therefore, when the sacristan shut the doors after Vespers, she used to retire with her sister and her most faithful friend and companion into a house near the church, that they might be able to return to it as soon as possible when the doors were re-opened.

She was accustomed to remain in the church in the morning until Tierce, unless her sister, who accompanied her, was obliged by business to return sooner, and she sometimes let her sister go home on condition that she should come back about Tierce to fetch her. Her father readily permitted her to do as she wished in these mat-

ters, for he reverenced her for her holiness, and loved her more tenderly than any of his other daughters; nor would he ever sit down to dinner till she returned. When she was at meals with her father, she used to take meat and pretend to eat it, but she frequently hid it, and because it was her whole study to subjugate the flesh to the spirit, she daily refused her flesh, not only its desires, but the necessaries of life, never satisfying her hunger, and in the midst of her penitence she always preserved a joyful and smiling countenance.

She was very far from speaking against those who were absent, nor could she bear to hear others do so in her presence, and always reproved them for it. Although she knew that many calumnies were spread against her, she never gave way to impatience or anger on that account, but she felt compassion for her detractors, and used to say with great charity and gentleness, "I am more sorry for them than for myself, for they injure themselves more than they injure me."

The enemy of mankind, seeing these and many more signs of sanctity in her, was moved to envy by her holy and happy works, and sought to overcome and deceive her by taking the form of different persons. First, as she was quite young and very beautiful, he appeared to her one day, while she was praying in her secret place in the wood, in the form of a handsome young man, and said to her, "Why do you spend your time in this way now? You will be able to do

that afterwards, so come now, and let us enjoy the pleasures of youth." When she turned away, with the intention of going to the house, he suddenly vanished, nor was he seen more.

He appeared to her a second time in a similar form when she was alone in her chamber, and said that her confessor had sent him to tell her that she was not to keep her vow of virginity; but she answered, "I should not believe you even if all preachers openly preached against me;" and she then called the maid with a loud voice, upon which he immediately disappeared.

Also when the Dominican Fathers held a provincial chapter, or when her confessor was elected prior of some convent, he occasionally appeared to her in the guise of a travelling friar, bringing her very bad reports of the chapter and of Father Conrad, her confessor. He used to say that there had been great divisions and disturbances, and even blows, and many wounds in the chapter; or that her confessor had run away with a woman and left the order; or that he was in great ignominy. When she said, "Where is your companion?" and he replied, "I left him at the door," then she recognized the enemy, and reproached him for having dared to assume the habit of such a great order, and adjured him by Jesus Christ to tell her the truth of all these matters, to which he answered, that they were all falsehoods, and that he had said them on purpose to fill her with sadness and grief.

He likewise came into her room once in the middle of the night, while her sister slept and

she prayed, in the form of a dog, snuffing and running restlessly about the room. She drove him away as she would a common dog, but after a little time he returned, showing the same uneasiness. When this had been repeated several times, she said, "What dog is this that will not leave us in peace?" He answered, "You know who I am;" and she said, "Since you can speak, you are not one of our dogs." He loaded her with reproaches and threats, to which she replied, "I am not afraid of you, you may do your worst;" but he said, "If he, or if they who are by you were not here, I should soon have my will." And after many more threats on his part, and confounding reproofs on hers, she dismissed him, telling him to go away with that malediction which God laid upon him and his, when He banished them from heaven to eternal pain and misery. He retired murmuring and howling; for after he had begun to speak with her he did not dare to go away till she dismissed him.

Another night he appeared to her three times in the form of a cat running about the room, and when she asked what this cat who thus disturbed her was, he answered with menaces and threats in a human voice, and withdrew grumbling when she dismissed him after a dispute with him.

He also took the shape of a serpent twice. One day when she was in the wood, and her sister was at a little distance from her, she saw a great serpent advancing towards her, which disappeared in some hole, when she called out to her sister to help her. And behold the same

night he appeared to her in his own hideous form, and said, "Vile woman, what are you doing?" She answered that she was doing and intended to do what pleased God; and he said, "Still I revenged myself upon you yesterday." She said, "How did you revenge yourself?" and he answered, "When you were terrified yesterday in the wood, and called to your sister to help you." She said, "Was that you who ran at me yesterday?" and he said, "It was." Then she said, "I do not fear in whatever shape I see you."

He appeared to her again in the shape of a serpent one night when she had laid down in her bed, and crawled by degrees under the clothes. She well knew what it was, and waited patiently till he had brought up his whole length into the bed. The monster was so cold that she could hardly wait, and throwing back the clothes quickly, she seized him with one hand by the middle and threw him with such force against the wall, that, judging by the noise it made, he would have been shattered. But he raised his head immediately, and endeavoured to terrify her by threats as he returned towards her. But he could not come near her, and she began to confound him with bitter words, saying that it was by the just judgment of God that he, who was at first an angel, should put on the likeness of a foul and abominable animal. Thus dismissed he retired in confusion, making a great noise.

At two different times while she was praying at night, he threw stones at her through the

windows of her room, and after a little while came in to ask for the stones. She said, "I have nothing of yours," and asked where he had taken those stones from, and he said that one was from the torrent Natissa, which flows past the city, and the other was from the Friars' limekiln, adding, "I went there because I wished to revenge myself on your base priest, (meaning her confessor,) and could not do it while you were praying for him."

He sometimes put on a most terrific aspect, with flaming eyes, with long tusks like a boar, moving his jaws and foaming at the mouth. Still, although she was very weak in bodily strength, she resisted him, showing great constancy in her words and answers. Wherefore, that wicked one once said, "How is it that when you seem nearly dead, and cannot speak, you fatigue me so much that I cannot answer you?"

Moreover, whenever power was given to afflict her person, he did so cruelly and in many ways, sometimes dragging her along the ground so violently, that she spit blood the next morning. Sometimes she was beaten by him so hard in the night, that the marks of the blows might be seen on her face and hands the following day. Sometimes he raised her from the ground, then threw her down with such impetus that her head-dress flew to a distance. Once when she strove most vigorously with him, strengthened by God's help, she raised herself up and cast him down on the ground before her, then putting one foot on his neck, she began to revile

him, and by her weight prevented him from getting away, though he continually cried out that she must let him go, for she had confounded him too much, and that he should be utterly shamed of appearing before his companions. At last, when she chose to release him, she sent him away with that malediction with which God cursed him and his companions in the beginning. He departed, making such murmurs and such a loud noise, that if they had fallen upon the ears of others as they did on those of Benvenuta, they would have been heard to the distance of a mile. Benvenuta did this in imitation of St. Margaret, whose feast it happened to be, as her confessor had instructed her. The evil spirits frequently molested her in other ways, which have escaped the memory of him who wrote these things.

CHAPTER III.

THE HEAVENLY CONSOLATIONS WHICH WERE BROUGHT TO HER BY THE SPIRITS OF THE BLESSED. SHE SUFFERS FROM NUMBNESS AND TREMOR IN HER LIMBS, AND DIFFICULTY IN BREATHING. HER UNWEARIED PATIENCE. SHE MAKES A VOW TO GOD IN HONOUR OF ST. DOMINIC, AND RECOVERS HER HEALTH.

Because in these apparitions and combats of the devils the holy Benvenuta was not a little afflicted in soul as well as in body, when her troubles were ended Christ communicated to her the greatest consolations, that that saying of the Apostle might be verified in her: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us; so also by Christ doth our comfort abound;"* for immediately after the assaults of the devil, different saints or angels appeared to her; sometimes the Blessed Virgin, sometimes angels, and sometimes many of the saints comforted and consoled her, praising her for having fought bravely, and telling her that God permitted these trials for the increase of her merits, and the greater glory of her reward, and that at some future time these things would be made manifest. Thus we read of our Blessed Saviour, that after

* Ep. Corinth ii. 1,

His victory over the temptations of the devil, the angels came and ministered to Ilim.

These temptations and struggles, joined to her fasts and vigils, prostrations and prayers, had so worn out her strength that she became extremely weak, and contracted many illnesses, yet she never left off her accustomed prayers or visits to the church, or her other works of devotion; so that at length she was not able to move from one place to another without the help of others, and this continued for about five years.

During this period she was unable to retain any food, and lived upon water only. Her hands were affected all the last four years of it with a violent tremor, and at last she became so ill that she could not breathe in a reclining posture, so a seat was prepared for her, in which she sat day and night for some years. And by continually remaining in the same position the skin wore away, and her flesh adhered to her clothes, so that they could not be taken off without pulling it off, and much effusion of blood. But in spite of all these sufferings she never uttered a murmur or one impatient word, but giving thanks in all things, she humbly prayed God to increase her pain according to His good pleasure. And although she could not move her body, her spirit was strongly moved by the holy desires of her will. For she longed to be with her body, infirm as it was, in the church of the Blessed Dominic, where she had received great and wonderful spiritual consolations at the mass and the Salve Regina, and in some of the

great solemnities of the year. Her sister, who was anxious to please her in all things, found a maid who was strong enough to carry her to church once a week. But as soon as she found an opportunity, at the end of two years, the maid went away, and as no one else could carry her to the church, Benvenuta was greatly grieved, and begged with tears that some one might be found who could satisfy her desire. Her sister hired several women for this purpose, but after a few times they became tired, nor could they be induced by money or by entreaties to undertake this task. Her sister Maria, seeing her sorrow, offered to do it herself, and being naturally strong, although she never drank wine, and suffered from a quartan fever in the evening, carried her at least once a week to church. And though many persons in the neighbourhood ridiculed her for doing it, for she carried Benvenuta lying upon her back, and her parents were not a little ashamed of the appearance of it, still neither she who was moved by the great love she bore her sister to carry her, nor she who was carried to satisfy her pious longings, desisted from the practice.

But Benvenuta, pitying her sister's labours, and desirous of preserving her from evil tongues, turned to God with devotion and prayer, seeking counsel and assistance from Him. And the Lord put it into her heart to make a vow to St. Dominic, promising that if she was cured by his prayers and merits she would visit his sepulchre as soon as possible. When she communicated

her purpose to her brother, a noble young man, and very pious, although he followed the military profession, and to her sister, who was a devout virgin, and enquired whether they would accompany her to Bologna to St. Dominic's shrine, if her vow was granted, her brother replied, "Sister, I will not only say to Bologna, but I am ready to accompany you even to Rome if you are cured." Her sister also consented with joy and devotion. Two pious sisters, one unmarried and the other a widow, belonging to a good family of Cividale were present, and they both promised to go also, if the vow should be successful, which they by no means anticipated.

After she had arranged these matters, and repeatedly poured forth the above prayer, the feast of the Annunciation, which she desired, and to which she had a particular devotion, arrived. Early in the morning she set herself to contemplate the joys of such a great day. And while she joyfully reposed in the sweetness of this meditation, her spirit was suddenly taken up to heaven, and she saw there a palace of unimaginable light, ornamented with gold, and gems, and indescribable riches. And our Lord Jesus Christ came forth in pontifical robes, with a deacon and sub-deacon, and two acolytes in their respective vestments. The Blessed Virgin crowned with her diadem, and accompanied by the choir of virgins, came to meet the Lord, and after making an inclination they took their places there. Then followed all the saints in their orders, who, after making a reverence to the Lord, went to their

appointed places. The Apostles began the introit Rorate cœli, and the harmony was taken up by all the saints. When the mass had proceeded as far as the purification of the chalice, the Blessed Virgin sent St. Agnes to the spirit of Benvenuta, who said, smiling, that she must now please to retire, for she had seen enough. But the spirit answered that she would on no account retire; so the message was repeated twice, and the spirit made the same answer, until the Blessed Virgin sent a third time, saying, "Let her go in peace, for to-day I will visit her in her own house;" and the spirit immediately returned to the body. And behold, the consolation of all the afflicted, the most holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven, and the Blessed Dominic in the habit of his order, stood by the side of her bed. This Queen said to her, "God be praised, my daughter;" and Benvenuta, at once amazed and rejoiced, answered, "O Lady, who are you?" and the Queen said, "I am the Mother of God, to whom you have so often prayed;" and to which the girl replied, "You are welcome, my dearest Lady." After a little more conversation the Blessed Virgin continued, "It has pleased my Son to-day, through the merits and prayers of this thy father, Dominic, to save your soul and body, and when you shall have received your health, He wills you to make it manifest to others that by his intercession you were cured." After these words and many others, which she would only reveal to her confessor, the prior of Cividale, under the seal of confession, that he

disclose it to no one during her lifetime, the Queen returned to heaven with her companion. The morning being now advanced, Benvenuta caused herself to be carried to the church of the Friars Preachers which was dedicated to St. Dominic, where, after having heard mass, she received holy communion, and while she was making her thanksgiving, the glorious Father St. Dominic stood before her, and taking her by the hand, said, "Rise up, my daughter." At the sound of his voice she immediately rose, and felt her contracted limbs straightened without any pain, her trembling hands ceased to shake, and all her hidden maladies vanished at the same time, and her angelic face resumed its usual expression. Thus the Blessed Father Dominic conducted her into the choir, and in spite of the prohibitions of the sacristan, her sister, the two sisters who had joined in her vow, and many other women followed her, being struck with astonishment at seeing her walk and enter the choir contrary to custom, but not seeing him who led her there. When the Blessed Father had brought her before the high altar, which was consecrated to him, he retired behind the altar and she returned into the church. As soon as her thanksgiving was over she rose from her knees in perfect health, and refused all assistance from the women who, ignorant of the miracle, wished to help her, saying that she was freed from all her illnesses; and indeed her steady hands and her walking alone sufficiently proved what she said. Thus without any help she left

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the choir, and after a visit of thanks to the altar of the Blessed Virgin, she returned to that of St. Dominic. The fathers who had assembled wondering at the miracle, wished to know if she was also cured of her inability to take food, and brought her some rice and milk of almonds, of which she ate a sufficient quantity, and felt strengthened by it. Lastly, she who had been carried to the church ailing and contracted, walked back to her house without a stick and without the assistance of any one.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE ACCOMPLISHES HER VOW. HER JOURNEY TO VENICE AND PADUA, WHERE SHE MEETS HER CONFESSOR, FATHER CONRAD, WITH FATHER JAMES HER BROTHER, AND HER RETURN TO ST. DOMINIC'S SEPULCHRE. HER MANNER OF LIVING WITH THE DOMINICAN NUNS IN CIVIDALE. SHE IS AGAIN ATTACKED BY THE EVIL SPIRITS, AND SEES HEAVENLY VISIONS.

After a few days, mindful of her vow, and grateful for the favours she had received, she left her native town with her brother and sister, and the devout women, to go to Bologna, to visit the shrine of the blessed Father St. Dominic, telling every one, as she had been commanded to do, that she was cured by his merits and prayers. While at Venice they decided to go by the way of

Chiusi to Bologna, but after they had set out on this road they changed their intention, and went through Padua, and this happened by Divine disposition, for Benvenuta's confessor, the prior of Cividale, and her own brother, also a friar of the order of Preachers, arrived at Padua at the same time on their return from the court of Rome. They were filled with the greatest astonishment on meeting Benvenuta and her companions, for when they had taken leave of her at Cividale, she was so ill that they expected rather to find her dead than alive when they came home. She said, joyfully, "Behold, I am cured; see my face and hands, that it is I myself!" The prior made her relate the miracle in due order to him privately, for she had not before told the mode of the miracle to any one, but simply said, that the blessed Dominic had cured her. The Prior, however, enjoined her to make known the miracle and all its circumstances to whoever should inquire about it, as the Blessed Virgin had told her to do. He then imperatively commanded her, in virtue of the obedience she owed him as her spiritual father, to give him an account of her past life, and the graces which God had granted to her in it. For he saw by the late stupendous miracle, and the holiness of her life, of which he was not altogether ignorant, how great her merit must be before God.

Thus compelled, with great reluctance, and after having given her a promise not to reveal them to any one during her lifetime, she informed him of many great and wonderful things. She

spoke of the austere life which she had led from her childhood, of how many and what great combats she had had with the evil spirits, the visits she had received from different saints, and their conversations with her, and the way and the number of times in which she was rapt in spirit, and saw great wonders of God, both in heaven and in other places.

The pilgrims after that continued their journey to Bologna, and accomplished their vow with much consolation; nor was this to be wondered at, for, as the Blessed Virgin had promised, St. Dominic accompanied Benvenuta both going and returning. As they passed through Venice, she devoutly visited the church of the Friars Preachers, where, in presence of the lector, many of the fathers, and a great number of ladies, she was asked to relate the history of the miracle. Fearing lest this might be a mark of vanity, she refused, alleging that they might hear everything from her confessor, to whom she had related it, and who was then present. At last, overcome by the importunity of the fathers, and the ladies who were there, she recounted in order the above-mentioned miracle, omitting only the being raised to heaven, which she afterwards confided to her brother, Father James. Finally, she returned to her own home, where she lived in perfect health for some years.

But she did not bear this state of things with patience, and she began to weaken her body with fasts, watchings, and other mortifications, for she always longed to suffer something for Christ, who

had suffered so much for her, and to carry about the mortification of Christ ever in her flesh. So weak did she again become, that she could scarcely go to church, without the help of one of her sisters, and this she never failed to do morning and evening.

The above-mentioned miracle had brought her into such esteem with the nuns of our order who lived in Cividale, and with the fathers who had the direction of them, that they gave her leave to go and stay with them at her pleasure; for her wonderful and most holy manner of living consoled and greatly edified the sisters. Once while she resided there, she was attacked by a fever, and some of the sisters who loved her the most, asked, as a favour, that they might go and live in the adjoining house where she was, to console and be ever ready to assist her. The principal of these was sister Margaret, who was noble by birth, and still more noble by her humility. While Benvenuta was ill, she never took off her clothes at night, nor would she have a bed for herself, but when she allowed herself a little repose, she sat on a board, and laid her head on the patient's bed.

Here the evil spirit, who had formerly assaulted Benvenuta, came to the room in which the nuns and she were sleeping, and assailed them with blows and threats, and even tried to crush Sister Margaret by pressing heavily upon her shoulders, but she adjured him with the following words: "Accursed spirit, I adjure you, by the Father, by the Son, by the Holy Ghost, and by the merits of

this holy person, that you leave me in peace." He left her, making a loud noise, as if some heavy weight had fallen on the floor, and renewed the attack a second and third time, but she always defended herself with the same words. At length he went under the boards, on which their beds were made, and endeavoured to annoy them by raging and murmuring, as if a dog or a bear were underneath gnashing its teeth and tearing the bed clothes. When he departed, he made such a horrible sound, that it is doubtful if there is anything in nature that could be compared to it.

At other times when the windows were so well fastened, that they could not be opened by any one from without, the devil opened them and threw a great stone into the midst of the sisters. Likewise when the house door was shut up, he frightened them by knocking on the iron outside, and when one of the sisters went down with the intention of bolting it more securely, so hard a blow was struck from without, that the bolt flew off the door. Also once sister Margaret found her strong girdle cut in two by an unseen hand.

In these and similar ways did he annoy them for many days, but Benvenuta often said, with a smile, to encourage them, "Be easy, and do not be the least afraid, for he cannot do you any harm."

One night when sister Magaret was asleep in Benvenuta's room, alone with her, while she was occupied in prayer, Benvenuta suddenly began to address some one, saying, "How dared you come up here? Depart at once without delay," and

using other terms of reproach. Sister Margaret was awakened by these words, and much alarmed; but after an hour had elapsed, and she had fallen asleep again, she was awakened by hearing Benvenuta conversing with some other person. She heard both their voices, but although she did not understand their words, the sweetness of their tones affected and consoled her very sensibly. She enquired of Benvenuta early in the morning with whom she had been speaking at night, but Benvenuta merely smiled, and said that she must forget those words.

Her sister Maria also related of Benvenuta that when they inhabited the same apartment, and she slept, but Benvenuta prayed, she was frequently awakened by hearing Benvenuta speaking to some other person, and sometimes she understood Benvenuta's words, but not those of her companion; and sometimes she heard expressions of gratitude and humility, as, "I thank you, my lady, for I am not worthy of so great a favour;" and "Suffer me to go with you." Sometimes she named this sister Maria. Maria also at times saw a great light in the room, and she would say, "Take care, Benvenuta, what can this light be?" and the answer was, "Go to sleep, and do not think about it."

Once when the two sisters were in the open court in their father's house, at a late hour on a clear night, when a number of stars were visible, Benvenuta began to speak to her sister of the beauty of the stars and of God's heavenly works. And, behold, the sky opened above them, and

gazing through this portal of heaven, they saw a glory and a light which mortal tongue cannot express, and so much light fell on the place they were in, that the inhabitants of the neighbouring houses, seeing a dazzling light enter through the windows and all the fissures, were greatly disturbed and amazed, for the light shone for the space of an hour.

CHAPTER V.

THE MIRACLE WORKED BY GOD IN THAT MONASTERY IN ANSWER TO THE PRAYERS OF BENVENUTA. SHE IS REFRESHED WITH MIRACULOUS FOOD BY THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL, WHICH WAS RELATED FROM THE PULPIT AFTER HER DEATH, BY FATHER CONRAD, HER CONFESSOR.

Before Benvenuta's illness, while she lived with the nuns of the monastery De Cella, she spent the night after the feast of the blessed Michael in prayer, while the sisters who were with her slept. Sister Margaret, however, watched and prayed with her, and she saw that when Benvenuta was prostrate on the ground, her spirit went into a rapture, which inspired Sister Margaret with much joy and devotion. After more than an hour, she perceived by the sighs which Benvenuta used to emit at such times, that her spirit had returned to her body. When she rose from the ground she complained to Sister Margaret, that

she was very thirsty, and the other offered to bring her either water or wine, but Benvenuta said, "I would not drink wine at this hour, and I do not wish you to go to the well to fetch some water now." And though Sister Margaret readily offered to go to the well, saying that she was not afraid of going there in her service, Benvenuta refused to allow her. She then earnestly entreated her to take off her gown and rest her head on the bed for a short time, to which Benvenuta, overcome by her importunity, consented. Then Sister Margaret, moved by a vehement impulse of devotion, bent over her and kissed her face, and such sweetness flowed into her soul from that touch and breath, that all the consolations of this life seemed to her unworthy to be compared to it. She could hardly believe that the joy of beatitude was greater than that joy and consolation, which made her soul wish to leave the body. It became a pain instead of a rest to her, to eat, to drink, to sleep, or to partake of any of the comforts of this life. Her eyes became rivers of sweet tears, and her body was filled with a great and unusual heat, which was agreeable and comforting, instead of producing pain or thirst, and there were no exterior signs of it, and this state of consolation lasted for fifteen days and more. Whenever she approached near to Benvenuta, her joy increased. The writer of the manuscript adds, that although the passing of time diminished the consolation which she felt at first, much still remains, and it is thought she will retain it to the end of her life, for she experiences greater sweetness in contem-

plation and prayer, and all that relates to devotion, than she did formerly.

Sister Margaret was subject for many years to an illness every winter, which began on the feast of St. Andrew, and lasted till after Easter. During this time she frequently lost the power of speech, and could only moan like an animal, with such signs of pain that it moved to compassion all who saw her. Once, in Benvenuta's presence, she was seized with this disease, and from the violence of the pain, she threw herself on a couch which was near, and Benvenuta, filled with pity, did the same on the other side of the room, and began to pray. And in a short time Sister Margaret rose from the couch without pain or any other symptom of her illness, which never troubled her from that hour, though the consultations of physicians, and the many remedies she had tried, had never been able to give her any relief.

Sister Bartolota was afflicted with the same malady for many years, until one day she was attacked by it in Benvenuta's presence, and the prioress entreated Benvenuta to have compassion on her and to help her. She took the sufferer's hands, and placed them in those of Benvenuta, who, raising her eyes, looked up to heaven, and the sister was freed at once and for ever from this disease.

At one time Benvenuta was ill, and Sister Margaret waited on her, although she was herself so unwell, that from her head to her feet, there was no part of her frame that had not its peculiar ailment, but the great love and respect which she

felt for Benvenuta, caused her to serve with joy and devotion in spite of this. When she was washing the patient's feet, she suddenly felt herself restored to health. But she perceived that all her complaints had been transferred to Benvenuta, and she exclaimed in great grief, "What have you done! Have you taken my illness to yourself? I will not allow this exchange; restore my disease to me." She continued in the same strain with great warmth, but her disease did not return to her, and then, almost angrily, she threw at Benvenuta the covering which she was going to put on her feet, and went away to a little distance. Benvenuta called her back several times, but she refused to come unless her illness was restored, until Benvenuta's importunity overcame her reluctance, and she returned to her side. Then Benvenuta said, "You must know, Sister Margaret, that you have sinned, and you have displeased God and St. Dominic;" to which Margaret replied, "I beg you to pray God to pardon me, and to punish me as He wills, for I am ready to suffer anything." And, behold, the disease again left Benvenuta and again attacked Sister Margaret, in a much severer form, so that she remained in bed all the following night in great suffering. Benvenuta said to the other nuns who had remained with her, "Sister Margaret has had a bad night."

The same Sister Margaret had a natural defect which she had inherited from her father, of not being able to eat cheese, or any dish which was made with cheese. Even if her food was touched

with a spoon which had been put into any dish containing the smallest portion of cheese, she was unable to eat it, and if she forced herself to eat it, it made her sick. Benvenuta noticed this defect, and once when they were dining together, she said, "Why do you not eat cheese, Sister Margaret?" She answered, "I cannot do it, which annoys me. But I have such confidence in you, that if you will help me, I shall be freed from this weakness." Benvenuta then took up a piece of cheese, and making the sign of the cross over it, gave it to Sister Margaret, saying, "Eat boldly," and she did so with relish, and never after found any difficulty in it.

There was in the same convent a young sister of the age of twelve, of whose name the initial L, which probably stood for Lucia, has been alone preserved. The eyes of this sister began to grow dim and were covered by a film like a spider's web, so that she only saw in a confused manner, as if she were looking through a thick linen cloth. She heard that Benvenuta's merits and prayers had restored many to health, and she went to her, and kneeling down laid her head in her lap, and begged with great earnestness and with many tears that her sight might be restored by her prayers. She continued to do this for a long time, and Benvenuta, who could not send her away because her head was in her lap, at length said, "Rise in peace." Then her eyes, which were dim, again appeared bright, and she saw everything distinctly, and the sisters sang the Te Deum in choir for this miracle. She was quite

well all the remainder of the day, but some one suggested to her that she ought not to believe that she had been cured by Benvenuta's merits; and she began to lend faith to this suggestion, whereupon her former blindness immediately returned. This circumstance was not hidden from Benvenuta, so she called the young girl on the following day, and said, "How are you, Sister Lucia." She was too much ashamed to answer, so Benvenuta pursued, "It has been done to you according to your faith." Then Sister Lucia fell at her feet, and begged her to have mercy on her still, nor would she be separated from her. So Benvenuta sent for a psalter and placed it open before her, telling her to read it. She answered, "I cannot, because it is not your wish that I should be able to read it." Benvenuta placed her hand on the first letters of a psalm, and when she took it off she told her to read it. And Sister Lucia read aloud without any difficulty the psalm that had been covered by her hand, which was the psalm "Voce mea." But when she turned over the pages she found that she could not see anything else, so she left Benvenuta, saying, "I cannot read, because you do not wish that I should be able." The next morning, however, when she rose early to matins, she read them for herself, and saw clearly all the remainder of her life. But Benvenuta could not see all the next day, as she herself testified, that is, for as long a time as Sister Lucia had persevered in her incredulity.

There was a nun named Aicha in the same

convent, who belonged to the noble family of Strafolt, who was afflicted by a violent fever, accompanied by such a bad sore throat, that for some days she was unable to swallow either food, broth, or water, or any liquid. The physician who attended her despaired of her recovery, and advised that she should receive Extreme Unction. In the meantime St. Dominic appeared to Benvenuta who was in her father's house, and said to her, "Go immediately to the dwelling of our sisters at the Cella, and cure Sister Aicha, who is now near to death; but do nothing for her until she has received Extreme Unction." Benvenuta set out in haste for the convent of Cella, accompanied by one of her neighbours, for her sister refused to go with her. The door was opened to her without delay, and she reached the bedside of the sick sister after this sacrament had been administered to her. The patient was much comforted at the sight of her, for she had great confidence in her merits, and she said, "I have great hopes that if you will give me with your hand some liquid, of which I am in great want; after you have blessed and tasted it, I shall be able to drink it." Benvenuta did everything that the sick sister required, and she drunk the draught without any difficulty, and not only was she able to eat, but she immediately became well, and stronger than she had been before her illness. She had formerly not been able to take milk and certain fruits without their giving her great pain, but from that time she ate them with ease and was benefited by them. When the doctor came

the next day, she walked joyously and easily to meet him, and when he saw her thus he fortified himself with the sign of the cross, saying, "That such a change could only have been effected by divine grace, for it was beyond the power of nature;" and went away astonished and edified. These wonders of healing, and many others which it would take too long to relate, did our Lord Jesus Christ work through Benvenuta in that convent of our sisters, to which all the oldest, most prudent, and pious nuns bore witness.

These miracles were not the only ones which our Lord worked for the Blessed Benvenuta, for He had done greater things for her before she came to live with the sisters. At the beginning of her five years' illness, a beautiful youth appeared to her one day at the ninth hour, bringing a splendid and shining pyx wrapped in linen of the purest white. He took out the contents of the pyx and placed them in Benvenuta's mouth, and then retired in silence. The tongue of man could never describe the sweetness and consolation which that food imparted to her. At length she began to muse on the circumstance, and to wonder why he, whom she knew to be a messenger of God, had not made himself known, and why he had said nothing from God to her. She therefore prayed with much fervour that He would send the same messenger once more, and that he might tell her who he was. And behold the next day at the same hour this messenger came as before, and said, after he had saluted her, that it was the will of God that he should

come in silence the first time, in order that she might pray as she had done, and that he should manifest his name in answer to her prayer. Then he said, "I am that messenger who was sent by the Son to His Virgin Mother, and by the Mother to the Son; I am the angel Gabriel." After he had given her the same food as the preceding day, he departed. This action was repeated daily for five years, until the Feast of the Annunciation, when, as we have related, she was miraculously cured. But after she had eaten earthly food, namely, the rice which they gave her, the angel never again brought her food, as the heavenly manna ceased to rain upon the children of Israel after they partook of the fruits of the land of promise.

This great favour was related to her confessor, the prior of Verona, by Benvenuta, as he compelled her to do so. And by his orders she confided it to a lady named Jacobina, one of her faithful friends and confidant; but she told it to both under the seal of confession, so that they should not reveal it to any one during her lifetime. She confided to them with the same secrecy many more most wonderful favours, and they kept their promise, and concealed them from all as long as she lived.

When she departed this life on the 30th of October, in the year 1292, her confessor, Father Conrad, prior of Verona, related this miracle in his sermon on the following Sunday, in our church in Cividale, to a large concourse of people, who, having had a great devotion to her

while she lived, had assembled to hear this sermon. Their devotion is much greater since her death.

CHAPTER VI.

IN ANSWER TO HER PRAYERS GOD DELIVERS FROM PURGATORY THE SOULS OF HER BROTHER, WHO WAS KILLED, OF THE BROTHER OF FATHER CONRAD, OF HER FATHER, OF THE ABBOT OF ALOSA, AND OF OTHER PERSONS. THE SISTER OF BENVENUTA. SOME REVELATIONS MADE TO HER BY JESUS CHRIST, AND THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD.

At the very hour in which it took place she told how her brother, who had been killed in a disturbance a short time before, was delivered from Purgatory by her merits and prayers.

The above-mentioned prior of Verona had also a brother in the world, a virtuous youth, who went to a certain festival with a party of friends. As it frequently happened at that period, a violent altercation arose among some of the guests, and the youth was severely wounded in the strife, but he defended himself valiantly and killed one of his adversaries; he, however, did not die at once, but was carried home, where the combatants forgave their injuries and made peace with each other, and he departed this life with signs of great piety after receiving the sacraments of the Church. The prior, seeing the

mode of his brother's death, and being aware, as Benvenuta's confessor, how great her merits were in the eyes of God, and how familiar she was with Christ, with the Blessed Virgin, and the other saints, urged her to intercede with God for the soul of his brother, which he believed to be suffering grievously in the pains of Purgatory. She excused herself, humbly saying that his prayers would be far more efficacious, but she was overcome by the prior's earnestness and importunity, and promised to do her utmost for his brother's soul. And not long after she had commenced praying for him, the dead man appeared to her one night when she was at her devotions, clothed in light, and kneeling down before her thanked her, saying that he was exempted by her merits and prayers from the great sufferings which he was to have endured for a long time, and that freed by them he was going to the kingdom of glory; and having thus spoken he disappeared.

She also liberated her own father who loved her as tenderly as she loved him. His name was Conrad of Bojano, he was a wise and eloquent man, well versed in business, and on that account was made counsellor and the judge of all worldly questions and business, which were not decided by a written law, but were discussed before the Lord Patriarch of Aquileia, and settled according to the customs of the country. When he found that his hour was come, he arranged his affairs with care, and divided his property equitably among his heirs,

and fortified by the sacraments of the Church, departed this life in peace. And since he had the management of many affairs of great importance, he stood in need of many suffrages, and his pious daughter Benvenuta prayed unweariedly every day for God's mercy for his soul. Some years had elapsed since his death, when he appeared to Benvenuta in a pitiable guise, asking for more assistance. Benvenuta could not be consoled, so great was her compassion, and thenceforward she interceded by every possible interior and exterior mortification for him, and gave him besides before God all the merits she had gained in the course of her life, that he might be freed from his misery. And after a little time, on the Feast of our Lord's Ascension, the father, surrounded by intense light, appeared to his daughter, to thank her for her help, blessing the day in which she was born, and announcing to her that by her merits he was ascending to glory. When the next anniversary of his death came round, a widowed sister of Benvenuta's came to see her, complaining that she could not afford to celebrate the anniversary of her father's death as she wished to do. Benvenuta replied, "However, you need not be uneasy about our father, because I am certain that he is in no need of our help." Her sister inquired how she knew this, but Benvenuta would not tell her for fear of vain-glory, till at length, conquered by her importunity, she confided the above-mentioned apparition to her, under solemn secrecy. But her sister broke her promise, and

revealed it with secrecy to another sister, a Benedictine nun, and neither was she faithful to her engagement, for she confided it in a similar manner to several persons. When this came to Benvenuta's ears, she was much distressed, and severely reproved her sister, to whom she had first related the circumstance, nor would she ever again confide a secret to her.

Not only these, but also other persons did her prayers and merits deliver from Purgatory during her lifetime, namely, the husband of her widowed sister, and the abbot of Mosa, who had died in the Roman court, and a nun, a native of Cividale. After they were liberated from their pains they all appeared to her in brightness, humbly and devoutly giving thanks to God and to herself for so great a favour, and after this they ascended with great joy to the kingdom of the blessed. All these things were related by Benvenuta before her death under the seal of confession, and to her faithful friend and confidant Jacobina, thus binding them to reveal them to no one as long as she lived. They were both faithful to this promise.

She was favoured by wonderful and unheard-of revelations, at times when her spirit was in the body, and at times when it was raised above it, for she was very often rapt in spirit. Sometimes revelations were made to her by Christ while her spirit remained in the body, sometimes by the Blessed Virgin, or by Christ and the Blessed Virgin together, and sometimes by St. Dominic.

Thus Christ manifested Himself to her once in the church of St. Stephen, which was close to her house, and where she used some time of the day to say the prayers she had not time to finish in the church of the Blessed Dominic. Whenever the rain or any other impediment prevented her from going to St. Dominic's, she was accustomed to pray in this church, which is well fitted for pious retirement, being far from the houses and traffic of men, and therefore very quiet. Here she saw a little boy of most sanctified beauty, and with a most joyful aspect. Benvenuta called him to her and began to amuse him with pious words. Among other things she said to him, "Have you a mother?" to which he replied, "Have you a mother?" and she said, "No, I have none," for her mother had recently died. But he said, "I have indeed a mother." She enquired, "Do you know the Hail Mary?" and he answered, "Do you know it too?" She said that she knew it, and the child said, "Now will you say it." She began, "Hail! Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."—At this last word the Child said, "and I am He," and immediately disappeared.

The Lord Jesus Christ manifested Himself again to Benvenuta in the year in which she died, on the Feast of the Resurrection. During that Holy Week Benvenuta had prepared herself as well as she could, by vigils, prayers, and tears, and other devout works, to celebrate the coming mysteries of our salvation; and one of her peti-

tions had been that the Lord would show her the manner and the form of His appearance to Mary Magdalen. And so while she was praying in her chamber early in the morning of Easter, as she had prayed, the Lord appeared to her. She received Him with as many thanks and as much humility as she was able to command, and then the Lord said to her, "Go to the church and fulfil your duties there, and when you return home I will appear to you again." When she reached the church, one of the fathers, who was the confessor, came from the sacristy to celebrate his mass at the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and to give communion to several persons, and she saw that the Blessed Virgin accompanied him. When he mounted the steps of the altar the Blessed Virgin rose above the altar, and remained there until the end of the mass. And when the priest gave communion, the Blessed Virgin humbly made an inclination to each of the communicants. Afterwards when the priest, according to the custom of the time, offered a chalice with unconsecrated wine to all who had received Holy Communion, as soon as it was Benvenuta's turn the Blessed Virgin descended from the altar, and taking hold of the opposite side of the chalice held it out for her to drink some of the wine. When the priest retired from the altar to the sacristy Benvenuta saw the Blessed Virgin follow him into it.

As soon as she returned home the Lord again appeared to her according to His promise. She threw herself at His feet with many humble

thanks, weeping incessantly, and the Lord said to her, "Why dost thou weep so much? Wouldst thou be another Magdalen? Do not weep any more, for a long time has passed since these things which I have shown thee happened."

She had many great and beautiful revelations from the Blessed Virgin. Once when the feast of our Lord's Nativity was approaching, she prepared herself, as was her pious custom, by vigils, prayers, and tears, and other works of devotion, to celebrate that great feast duly, and in hopes of receiving some special consolation from God. And when the blessed night of Christmas arrived, she was in St. Dominic's church, meditating how the Virgin Mother had swathed the Lord in a few mean clothes, and inflamed by her great compassion and pious longings, she besought the Blessed Virgin to allow her to see the Lord in that appearance. As she prayed at the altar of St. Peter Martyr, she saw a lady carrying a child in her arm, and accompanied by an old man with a stick. And the lady said to her, "Return to your home and to-night you shall see what you prayed to see." When she went back to her father's house, the Blessed Virgin and the same old man appeared to her in her chamber, and saying, "Receive what you sought for," she placed her Son in Benvenuta's arms. After she had held Him there for at least an hour with unspeakable exultation of heart and wonderful consolation, the Blessed Virgin said, "Now restore my Son to me, for you have embraced Him long enough." As soon as she had

again received her Son into her arms she disappeared, leaving Benvenuta full of immense consolation.

The Blessed Virgin also revealed to Benvenuta the prayer which Sister Weremburg, the prioress of our sisters, had made for her on the night of the Annunciation, which prayer had been wonderfully powerful. Now by reason of her perpetual genuflections Benvenuta used to have an imposthume, first on one knee and then on the other, and sometimes it was necessary to make an incision to cure them. The last she had came after she had been cured by the Blessed Dominic. She concealed it for several days in hopes that it would subside of itself, but it swelled, on the contrary, every day, until she could no longer bear the weight of it, and on Christmas Eve a skilful surgeon, who was called Master Boniface, came with an assistant to make an incision. A quantity of blood came out, but Benvenuta bore the operation with the utmost patience, remaining quite silent and still, without being held. They put a large poultice on the swelling, and so it remained from Christmas Eve till the eve of the Annunciation. During this time the suppuration had no bad smell, which excited the doctor's astonishment, nay, when he medicated it he said that a sweet odour issued from it; which attested the wonderful purity of her interior and exterior nature. She asked him on the eve of the Annunciation to give her leave to assist at the ceremonies of the Church on such a great day. The doctor reflected a little, and

said, "I wish that God may be her physician." He bathed the knee with hot water, and taking out a large poultice, which was made of the wax of great candle, he put on a certain plaister and bound it up; and said, as he went away, "Do not remove the bandage until I come; and I will accompany you to church to-morrow, in order to assist you if anything should happen to it." On the following night Sister Weremburg the prioress made a prayer to God, that He would deign, through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, to cure her in a manner that would redound to His honour and glory, and that of His Blessed Mother. The next morning when the doctor went to examine her wounded knee, and undid the bandage, he found the wound perfectly healed, and the swelling reduced, which the efforts of the physician, assisted by nature alone, could never have accomplished. Thus they returned thanks to God. After a few days Benvenuta went to visit the prioress, and when she enquired of her what prayer she had made for her on the night of the Annunciation, she received in reply that she had forgotten what it was, and Benvenuta said, "You made this prayer for me," and repeated it. When the prioress recalled it to her memory she was much astonished to find that Benvenuta had repeated it correctly, and said, "How do you know you know it?" to which she answered, "The Blessed Virgin told it to me."

The Blessed Virgin often manifested herself to her in a wonderful manner. She was once passing

the night in meditating on the most Holy Virgin and her blessed Son; and inflamed by her longing for them, she went out into the open air, under the starry sky, and while she gazed intently into it, she saw heaven open, and the Blessed Virgin with her Son in her arms descended so low towards her, that she could distinctly see the Son and the Mother. After she had satisfied Benvenuta's desires by remaining there some time, the Blessed Virgin returned to heaven. The heaven was closed after a little interval, and a red ray, like a long lance, marked the opening for a considerable space of time. She had this apparition very frequently, sometimes three times in the same night. The prioress and the devout widow, Jacobina, who had heard it from her own mouth, bore witness to this fact.

Benvenuta's great devotion to Saturday made her look forward, from reverence to the Blessed Virgin to this day with great joy, and when it arrived, she used to spend it in watching and prayers; and thus she deserved a special grace from God on that day. At the fourth hour of the night, which preceded Saturday, she used to sing to her a heavenly song and harmony, which consoled her greatly. She revealed this happiness of hers to one of her sisters who was a nun, not speaking as of herself, but of another person, (for this was the way she used in describing the wonders and revelations which were granted to herself,) and it happened some time afterwards, that she paid a visit to her sister's monastery to spend a few hours with her. They slept in the same

room, and the nun went to bed as usual on Saturday night, while Benvenuta employed herself in contemplation and prayer. But her sister recollected the heavenly melody which Benvenuta had spoken of, and she began to watch in hopes of hearing it. When the time was past, the nun said to Benvenuta, "Why do not you begin to rest? I now see that you are not the person who heard that heavenly melody of which you spoke to me; because, although I have watched until now, and listened with attention, I have not been able to hear anything." Benvenuta laughed, and replied, "Certainly, she for whom it was intended heard it well enough."

She once had a vision of Christ and the Blessed Virgin together. When she was ill, with that sickness which confined her for many years to the same spot, and obliged her to remain sitting in a chair, being unable to lie down, she began to contemplate the grief of the Blessed Virgin in those three days when she sought for the Child Jesus who was in the temple. She desired to keep company with the Blessed Virgin in that affliction, for she had been accustomed to sorrow all her life; and had heretofore sought for suffering, and fled from prosperity and bodily health, so she began to pray earnestly that Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin would deign to grant her this gift, of feeling in herself that grief of the Blessed Virgin. And, behold, an holy and honourable lady appeared to her, with a beautiful and graceful child, who began to walk about the room, keeping close to his mother. His aspect and con-

versation inspired her with sublime happiness; but when once she sought to touch him, he withdrew from her, and they both suddenly disappeared. Whereat a vehement grief took possession of her soul, and which continually increased, and afflicted her so deeply that she was not able to receive any consolation, and it appeared to her that her soul would go out of the body. She was thus compelled to call on the Blessed Virgin to help her, for she could no longer endure it. At the end of three days the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, with her infant Son, and placed Him in Benvenuta's arms, and all her sorrow and grief fled away, and her wonderful consolation was restored. The Blessed Virgin said to her, "You desired to feel the grief I experienced at losing my Son, and you have felt it; but do not desire such things in future."

CHAPTER VII.

FURTHER REVELATIONS MADE TO HER BY THE ANGELS AND THE BLESSED SPIRITS. SHE SEES THE PASSION OF OUR LORD. OTHER REVELATIONS FROM HEAVEN.

The angels also made some great revelations to her. The principal and most astonishing of these, her being fed daily by the angel Gabriel with heavenly food, has been already described. The prudent virgin would not disclose it to any man

as long as it lasted, and when indeed she was compelled to mention it, she refused to do so, unless under the seal of confession, that is, that it should be confided to no one during her lifetime, which promise was firmly made and faithfully kept. After her decease, however, it was publicly preached, in order to spread the glory of God, and to show the merits of the Virgin; and then the minds of all those who were satisfied, wondered how she could live for so many years, for even if at an interval of ten days, she took the lightest food, she was invariably unable to retain it.

Two angels likewise appeared to her in the last year of her life in this world, in the night before the nativity of the Blessed Virgin, in the following form.

When our Blessed Lady's nativity drew near, she prepared herself according to her laudable custom, for some days before it with many vigils and prayers, and pious works, that she might be worthy to celebrate the coming festivals more properly, and that God might give her some special consolation on that day. When the night before the nativity arrived, she began to contemplate the Blessed Virgin's wonderful birth, her appearance after it, and how she was carried by her mother in those days. And with an ardent desire she sighed for the grace of seeing her in that form, and prayed most earnestly that the Lord Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother would grant this her pious desire. After this, two beautiful youths appeared to her, and their salutation

was, "Servant of God, may God be with you." She thanked them with due reverence, and one of them said, "Do you know me?" And showing his companion, he said, "Do you not know him well?" "I do not know you, but I entreat you to tell me the truth." Then, he who had spoken first, replied, "I am the angel Raphael, and this is the angel Gabriel, who has visited you so often." He continued, "Behold, the prayer which you made to-night has been heard, and the mother and the daughter are coming soon to you. You must prostrate yourself on the ground, and receive them with great reverence and devotion. When the mother shows her daughter to you, if the daughter stretches out her hands to you, do you also extend your arms and receive her in them. But if she does not extend her arms, neither do you extend yours to her." After these words, they disappeared, and the mother with her daughter, and a venerable man, came to her chamber, and saluted her, saying, "May God bless you, true servant of God." The man who was with them, looked devoutly at her, with a joyful countenance, and said, "Blessed be you, O friend and true servant of God." Prostrate on the ground, as she had been taught, she offered humble thanks to God with tears. When she rose up, the mother showed her daughter to her, saying, "Behold what you prayed for." As Benvenuta gazed devoutly at her, she stretched out her arms towards her. And Benvenuta extended hers, and received her into her arms. She began to caress her, and speak to her, but she was

silent, so Benvenuta said to her mother, "I wish you would make her answer me," but the mother said, "You know well that infants of that age cannot speak." After Benvenuta had nursed her for a long time, her mother said, "Now, return my daughter to me, for you have held her long enough." Having taken up her daughter, they returned to heaven, leaving Benvenuta overflowing with consolation. She had this vision fifteen weeks before her death.

She had once a beautiful vision of St. Dominic, while her spirit remained in the body. She had prepared herself for his feast, as she was accustomed to do, by her works of devotion, in hopes that by the merits and prayers of the Blessed Dominic, God would grant her some special favour; and while she was in the church, after the first vespers of his feast, the saint appeared to her accompanied by St. Peter Martyr, and saluted her, and having said, "You have obtained what you asked from God, and before you leave the church to-day, you shall see a consolation which will please you," they disappeared. And behold, after Compline, when the fathers came out of the choir in procession at the end of Compline, singing the Salve Regina, she saw the Blessed Dominic follow them in the place of the prior, for Father Gerard de Barbara, the existing prior, was absent. When they had all issued from the choir, St. Dominic went and stood in the prior's place, and when the Hebdomadarius went round with the holy water, St. Dominic followed him, and embraced and kissed each of the fathers after

they had been sprinkled, and when he had thus embraced them all, he returned to the place of the prior. At the end of the Salve Regina he returned with the Fathers into the choir, and going round his own altar, which was at the end of the choir, was seen no more.

In a similar manner when the fathers came out of the choir to Compline on the succeeding day, the Blessed Virgin came with them in the place of the prior, and stood in his post, and when the Hebdomadarius sprinkled the fathers with holy water, the Blessed Virgin followed him, and made an inclination to each when they had received it. She then went back to the prior's place, and returned with the fathers into choir, after which she disappeared.

Benvenuta also sometimes saw the Blessed Virgin between two acolytes while the Salve Regina was sung, holding her Son in her arms with His face turned towards the fathers. When they sung "Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui nobis post hoc exilium ostende," she stretched out her Son in her arms towards the fathers, and sometimes made the sign of the cross with Him over them.

Moreover, on the feast of Pentecost, whilst they sung the hymn Veni Creator Spiritus, she sometimes saw a fiery flame which concealed the whole choir. Then Benvenuta looked at the people who were in church, to see whether any one but herself saw it. When she perceived that they did not, she was greatly consoled and returned thanks to God.

She received most frequently stupendous revelations while her spirit remained in the body, occasionally many times in one day; and then she beheld the wonders which God and the saints worked on the earth, and the wonders of God and the saints in heaven, but she very seldom disclosed them. This was the manner of her raptures. Whatever state or position her body was in when the spirit left it, it remained in that until it returned. Whether it was standing, or sitting, or in a recumbent posture, it continued in it during the absence of the spirit, and in the meantime it neither saw, nor heard, nor felt anything. When her spirit returned she emitted slow and tremulous sighs. She was not a little confused if she saw that any one had noticed her rapture.

In the last year of her life when the Passion of our Lord began to be sung in the churches, namely, from Palm Sunday through the entire Holy Week, she prepared herself with all her power in mind and body to celebrate the sacred mysteries of the Passion with great devotion, hoping also to receive a particular favour from God at that time. And when she contemplated the Lord's Supper with His disciples, and how He went out after it to the place of prayer with them, and how, while He prayed He sweated blood, how the traitor Judas came with crowds, and with the ministers of the Jews, with lights and arms, how he betrayed the Lord with a kiss, and all those things which followed, she was seized with a vehement desire of seeing the

places, and the persons, and all that was done in the Passion, and she besought the Lord with great earnestness to allow her to feel the sorrow of His Passion, and to keep company with the Blessed Virgin in the grief of it. On Holy Thursday, at the time of the Lord's Supper with His disciples, her spirit was rapt from the body, and she saw the Lord at supper with His disciples, and heard the words He spoke to them at table, and witnessed His prayer, His betrayal, the mockery He received in the house of the high priest, and the scourging at the column.* She said that "the house in which He was scourged was dark, and that no one was in it but the two ministers who scourged Him and one of the Apostles, but it is unknown which of the Apostles it was. The spirit of Benvenuta was also present, in vehement sorrow at the scourges which the Lord endured; and in spirit she approached the Lord, and with bitter tears embraced Him and the column. She afterwards saw the sentence of death pronounced upon Him, and the cross placed on His shoulders, and how He went to execution carrying the cross, and how a multitude of women followed Him, weeping and lamenting over Him. The spirit of Benvenuta went with these women weeping likewise, and

* St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, who is illustrious for her sanctity and her visions, is related to have said in an ecstasy that Christ was scourged by thirty couples of ministers, that is, by sixty men. Cornelius a Lapide in Cap. xxvii. Matthæi, Vita. Part. VI. The first book of St. Bridget's Revelations states that the Blessed Virgin was present at the scourging of Jesus. These are, however, harmless ideas, inspired by the pious meditations of a mind deeply touched by fervour.

crying out. When they reached Mount Calvary, she saw Him placed on the cross and raised on high. She saw the Blessed Virgin weeping and heard the words of her lamentation. The spirit of Benvenuta stood by the cross and embraced it, weeping bitterly. And she saw how He expired in the midst of the crying and tears at the ninth hour, and how He was taken down from the cross and laid in the sepulchre. In fact, she saw everything that was done in our Lord's Passion as well and clearly as if she had been present at it all in body and soul. When her spirit had gone through these scenes in their order, it returned to the body, carrying with it the sorrow of the Passion of Christ, which it felt in its state of separation.

This sorrow made her unable to eat, drink, or sleep, or to do anything, nor could she restrain her tears. After this the angel Gabriel stood before her and saluted her, and said, "Now you have indeed obtained what you desired, and asked from God." She replied, "Yes I have, and I beg you to return many thanks to my Lord for this; and entreat for me that if it pleases Him He will condescend to mitigate my external grief, so that I may go to church to-day and be present at the office, and that the bitterness of my grief may not be noticed by men." The angel answered, "Wait a little while and I will answer." He disappeared and shortly returned, saying, "You have obtained your request; go safely where you will." By the light of morning, however, she perceived several drops of blood

upon the veil which hung from her head; she thought at first that they had issued from her nose, but finding that this was not the case, she saw that the marks had been made by her tears, which were the colour of blood, as they had been on some other occasions. So she changed her veil and went to church, placing herself in the corner which she always occupied, and knelt down and threw herself forward on a bench, where she began to consider the Lord's Passion which she had witnessed supernaturally that night, and poured forth such a flood of tears, that the edges of her veil, with which she dried them, were soaked as if they had been immersed in water. Moreover, the devout widow Jacobina, her faithful confidant, who was praying beside her, saw streams and marks of her tears on the bench over which she leaned, and she said that her eyes appeared red, as if they had been tinged with blood. Her tears were also of a bloody colour, but neither Jacobina nor any one except Benvenuta could see this, as Benvenuta had obtained from God that no one should know her anguish, lest she should become conspicuous among men, or give occasion for evil speaking against her. The tears she shed then, and in the preceding night, were those which an angel collected in a shining vase, and showed to Benvenuta on Easter Day, saying, "These are the tears which you have shed in these days for the Passion of the Lord; behold I bear them into Heaven, because the earth is not worthy to retain them." Benvenuta remained in that grief the

following day and night, and on Holy Thursday until the mass. When the "Gloria in excelsis" commenced, her grief somewhat abated. When the priest elevated the Body of the Lord her grief was greatly calmed, for she saw Him in the form of a beautiful boy. But it was still more appeased at the elevation of the chalice, when she saw the same Child standing upon it, with His feet on the lips of the cup, and thenceforward her sorrow gradually decreased.

Early the next day, that is, on Easter morning, our Lord appeared to her as He had appeared to Magdalen, and she threw herself at His feet with many tears, and called Him, but she could not touch Him. The Lord said to her, "Why do you weep so much? Would you be another Magdalen? If you had lived in her time, then you would have done what she did. But go to the church and do your duty there, and you shall see me again when you return;" and with that He vanished from her eyes. Benvenuta went to church and made her communion, and on her return the Lord again appeared to her, as He had manifested Himself to the two women returning from the sepulchre. She prostrated herself before Him with many tears, and thanked Him, and the vision ended. He appeared to her on three other occasions on Easter day, but she never said how or where.

After dinner on Easter day, when Benvenuta was alone in her room, for her sister had gone out with some friends, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her with the three other Marys, and

saluted Benvenuta with the greatest affection, saying, "Because in these days you have kept me company in the grief of the Passion of my Son with these your friends, I have come with them to keep you company, and to console you with the glory of the resurrection." Benvenuta thanked her with her whole heart, and with great humility, and the Blessed Virgin conversed with her for a long time. Benvenuta always refused to make known what she had said to her, as well as the names of the persons whom she had recommended to our Blessed Lady. And wonderful was the consolation which she received in this visit from the Blessed Virgin and the two holy women who accompanied her, for they spoke with her during the whole time which lasted between two ringings of the bells which announced a sermon.

Benvenuta had a most sublime and wonderful revelation in the last year of her life, on the feast of our Lady's Assumption. When this solemnity approached, she prepared herself with all the powers of her soul and body, to celebrate these joys with great devotion, always hoping in the Lord that He would give her some particular consolation at this solemnity. And behold in the night which preceded it, she saw the Blessed Virgin with St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Dominic, with the holy virgins Catherine and Agnes, who sung alternately heavenly songs with a heavenly melody. The Blessed Virgin raised her hand as a sign of silence, and saluted Benvenuta affectionately,

saying, "You have prepared yourself for this feast with much solicitude and due devotion; therefore am I come with these your saints, to whom you are especially devoted, to give you joy, and to visit you, that you may see how to-day's feast is celebrated in the church triumphant by the citizens of heaven. And I wish that you should know that there is not one soul on the earth to whom my Son shows to-day such favour as to you, for He would not send any other messenger from heaven to invite you to my feast-day, but myself; and on His part and on my own part I invite you to assist to-day in Heaven at the joys of my Assumption;" and having said this she disappeared. Then the spirit of Benvenuta was rapt from the body, and standing between St. Catherine and St. Agnes, it saw how the Lord Jesus Christ bore the soul of His most Blessed Mother, and how all the angels and saints who were there followed Him with songs and rejoicings, as they ascended in procession according to their rank. At the sound of their harmonies the angels and saints who were in heaven advanced with hymns and exultation to meet her, and thus she was received with triumph in heaven, and rising above all the saints and the choirs of angels, was seated on a throne of glory at her Son's right hand. Then the Blessed Virgin smiled and made a sign to St. Agnes to say to the spirit that it should now retire, for it had seen enough. The spirit refused, saying that it wished to see the whole solemnity. The angels next surrounded our Lord Jesus

Christ, and put on vestments for mass, and our Lord began to sing the introit of the mass, and the others continued it, but our Lord's voice resounded above all their voices. When the office was ended the spirit of Benvenuta returned to the body.

On the feast of the Translation of St. Dominic, before this feast of the Blessed Virgin's Assumption, Benvenuta had another devout revelation. She prepared herself for the festival with her accustomed devotions, and about the middle of the preceding night St. Dominic appeared to her as she was praying, and saluted her piously, and said, that he was sent by the Blessed Virgin to announce to her that our Lord was about to give her a special consolation on this feast of His. Her spirit was immediately taken up from the body, and led to the church of the Blessed Dominic at Bologna, where she beheld the Blessed Virgin standing beside his shrine with the choir of virgins, and by her orders the spirit of Benvenuta was placed near her, between St. Catherine and St. Margaret. And she saw companies of the saints assemble with songs in the church and round the shrine. And after they had remained there singing for some time they reascended with songs, and other companies of saints also descended with music in the same manner. And there followed similarly a third company of saints, and many more according to their order, until the aurora. St. Dominic in the meantime instructed the spirit, and named the saints as they

descended and ascended after their order and dignity. When Benvenuta's spirit saw the friars saying office and traversing the church, she said to St. Dominic, "Can the fathers see us now?" St. Dominic said, "Do not be afraid, my daughter, for they cannot see us by any means." About the aurora her spirit returned to the body, and kept the feast with us in the church of St. Dominic's convent at Cividale. Benvenuta confided this revelation to Sister Weremburg, formerly prioress of our sisters, and to some of our sisters; and she also related it to her faithful and pious confidant Jacobina, on condition that she would tell it to no one during her life-time.

Moreover, in the same year, on the following feast of St. Michael, her spirit went into a rapture and was placed near Purgatory, and she saw many souls delivered from Purgatory who thanked her, and said that they had been set free by her merits. The archangel Michael was there, and Benvenuta begged that he would condescend to pray that God would take her from this life to His glory. The archangel answered, "The hour is not yet come, for your life is yet very useful. As these souls have been delivered from Purgatory by your merits, so are there many others there who entreat your assistance; nevertheless I will present your request to God."

She related many other visions to Father Conrad her confessor and prior of Verona, and the devout widow Jacobina, which escaped their memory. She kept to herself some revelations

which were greater than the rest, promising to relate them in their season, but her death prevented her from doing so.

CHAPTER VIII.

BENVENUTA RECEIVES THE GIFT OF PROPHECY. SHE FORETELLS THE FUTURE, AND READS THE SECRETS OF HEARTS. SHE FULFILS THE DUTIES OF AN ABSENT SISTER IN THE PERSON OF THAT SISTER.

She showed the spirit of prophecy on many occasions, manifesting the secrets of their hearts to many persons, and predicting future events. When Sister Wilburgis left the dormitory one morning to go to say Prime, on her way to the choir she was assaulted by a temptation of the devil, by fear and great anguish, for it appeared to her that she had never done one thing that was pleasing to God, and that she must therefore be abominable in His sight, and unworthy of His mercy, and of the society of the blessed. She paused to indulge in these thoughts, and the fear and anguish of her soul began to reveal themselves in her looks; so the sisters, whom she found in the choir saying Prime, were struck by her pale and altered countenance, and went up to her, saying, "You are very ill, Sister Wilburgis, leave the choir and go to rest." As she went out of the choir, Benvenuta, who was also in the church in a concealed seat which was separated from

the other stalls of the choir, left her place and went up to her, and putting her hands on Sister Wilburgis' head guided it to her own breast, saying, "Fear nothing, my dearest sister, for you are not damned, but your soul is in a good state, and you are a friend of God." Her internal and her external condition were instantly and completely changed; joy, gladness, and consolation entered her heart; her face expressed joy, and cheerfulness, and she became in fact happier than she was before the temptation. Sister Wilburgis herself declared these things in the presence of several sisters.

On the feast of St. Cecilia Sister Margaret prayed for sometime, and when she saw Benvenuta on the same day, Benvenuta recited her prayer to her at length, as Sister Margaret testified before many of the sisters. Sister Bartholotta also, having made a long prayer, went afterwards to see Benvenuta, who recited her prayer to her in the order in which she had made it. Sister Bartholotta herself asserted this to some of the sisters.

A lady in the world sent a fine scarlet dress to one of the nuns, who was her relation, with an anxious request that she would sew some pearls and other female decorations upon it, but as the sister did not dare to do it without leave, she went to ask permission from the prioress. The prioress refused to give it her, but since the sister persisted in asking with great warmth, she yielded, and said that she must do this work in private. She added, that she only

acceded to her desire on condition that she would tell her relation that neither she nor any other lady should trouble them again with work of this nature. The sister moreover was to work at it so secretly that the other nuns should not know of it. So the sister went with one other into a retired corner of the dormitory and began the sewing. Benvenuta was at her own home during this transaction, but the next morning when she went to St. Dominic's church, she addressed the matron, who has been mentioned above, who had the liberty of frequenting the convent of our sisters, and said to her, "Tell Sister Nicholotta that she well deserves that one of her hands should become in the same condition as the other is. She said that she had a disease in one of her hands, and could not use it as much as the other, that she might hide herself in a corner of the dormitory in order to do that work. Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin and St. Dominic saw it well, and it displeases them." The matron did not know what she alluded to, and wondered at her words, and as soon as she returned to the cloister, she told the prioress and Sister Nicholotta what Benvenuta had said reproachfully to her. They also wondered very much, for the transaction had been so private that no other person in the convent knew of it. Many instances of this kind might be recorded of Benvenuta, if it were not tedious to the recorder. The prioress related these things in the presence of many of her sisters to me who have recorded them.

On Whit-Tuesday Sister Margaret did not hear the bell for Matins and was not present at them. Another person, however, assisted in choir with the sisters, occupying her place, and resembling her exactly in height, in appearance and voice, and performing all Sister Margaret's duties. When morning arrived Sister Margaret began to lament, and was not a little grieved and confused that in such a solemn time she had been absent from Matins. But the sisters contradicted her, asserting that she had indeed been at Matins, for they had seen her reading and singing, and performing all her duties. Sister Margaret, however, continued to deny that she had been there, and they affirmed the contrary, to the great surprise of both parties. The principal cause of Sister Margaret's sorrow at having missed Matins was that she feared it might give to some an occasion of speaking against Benvenuta, whose especial friend she was. But some of the sisters said, "There can be nothing else but that Benvenuta has, by Divine assistance, in Sister Margaret's likeness, supplied her deficiencies, lest she who is so devoted to her should be confounded."

The lady Leucardis, that matron who lived in her secular dress with the nuns, went the same day to the church of St. Dominic, and finding Benvenuta, she related the whole affair to her, adding, "Truly it was you who supplied Sister Margaret's omission." Benvenuta neither contradicted nor assented to this statement, she

merely replied, with a smile, "I have done greater things for Sister Margaret."

A similar circumstance occurred on another occasion, when Sister Margaret was out of health. It was the day after the feast of the Blessed Peter Martyr, and the prioress had said to her, "Do not get up for matins, as you are not strong enough." But when the other sisters had risen, and had chanted the greater part of those matins with great solemnity after their custom, Sister Margaret, who was lying in her bed, according to the directions of the prioress, heard the solemn music, and was prevented by her devout feelings from taking any more rest, so she got up. From the commencement of Matins, however, a person exactly resembling her had performed all her duties. As soon as Sister Margaret had risen she went into the choir, and having bowed to the altar, advanced towards her seat, and when she had reached the front benches, which the sisters use when they make prostrations, Sister Catherine, whose place was next to hers, to her great astonishment, saw Sister Margaret coming up, and another exactly like her remaining in her stall, so she went to meet Sister Margaret, and taking hold of her, said to her, "Who are you?" She replied, "I am Sister Margaret." When Sister Catherine turned round she perceived that she who had been standing next her had disappeared from that place, nor was she again seen. Sister Margaret, who had recently arrived, stood in her stall and finished the remainder of Matins

with the other sisters. This remarkable fact was noticed by several of the sisters.

Again, when Sister Margaret was absent from None, another person was seen in her place, resembling her, as has been said, in all things. Moreover, the devout widow Jacobina, Benvenuta's confidant, heard from her who that person was who had supplied the deficiency of one of the sisters who was absent from Matins, singing and reading, and performing all the functions of that sister, in the form of that sister, for Benvenuta almost always spoke of herself in the third person when relating any miracle.

After these occurrences when Benvenuta went to the grate of the convent of our sisters, and the prioress and several of the sisters were there, Sister Margaret thanked her, saying, "My dearest Benvenuta, I thank you that it has pleased your charity to supply my place at those Matins, and to cover my shame and confusion." The sisters who were present confirmed these words, and Benvenuta blushed and begged them to leave off thinking about them, and never again to say things of that sort to her.

CHAPTER IX.

HER FREQUENT RAPTURES AND ECSTASIES, AND THE CAUSES OF THEM.

Who shall ever know how often her blessed spirit was rapt from her most holy body, for she would never manifest this to any one? If she thought that her raptures had been observed by anybody she was much confused, and her face was covered with blushes.

For many years before her happy passage from this life, her spirit was very often taken up from the body during mass. She once assisted at a mass and her spirit was not in her from the beginning to the end of it, nor did she hear any part of it, except the "Ite Missa est," sung by the deacon. She was often in a rapture during the Salve Regina, during her contemplation, and her night prayers.

During the time when Benvenuta lived almost entirely at her monastery with our sisters, which lasted from the feast of St. Augustine until the day of our Lord's Resurrection, they frequently observed her spirit to be in raptures, of which some were more evident and remarkable. The first of these happened an hour after Complin, while the sisters, who had finished their prayers, were leaving the church; Benvenuta prostrated herself before the altar with her head slightly

raised, and thus she remained without sense or motion, to the great admiration of several of the sisters who saw it; for although they called her, touched her, and tried to move her, she heard nothing and remained perfectly motionless. She remained in this state a longer time than it would take a person to recite forty Hail Marys slowly. And although they tried still harder to rouse her, she remained thus for a good hour before the spirit returned to the body.

Another time on the Eve of St. Michael, Benvenuta was sitting under a tree after dinner with the sub-prioress and seven or eight of the sisters, speaking about the angelic spirits. And while they thus conversed with each other, the spirit of Benvenuta was taken away before their eyes, and her face changed, for her eyes became red as blood, and her tears fell profusely, and thus she remained for a whole hour. The sisters who stood round her were amazed at such a wonderful change, and at the end of the hour her spirit returned, and her face resumed its ordinary colour. When the prioress and Sister Nicholotta, who were her particular friends, enquired of her where she had been and what she had seen, she answered with great confusion, and begged them not to tease her with these enquiries. But they asked so earnestly that they at last compelled her to satisfy them. She first made them promise never to reveal it to any one as long as she lived, and then she told them that she had been to Purgatory, and seen the soul of her relative, her sister's husband, who had loved her much in this

life, and done a great deal to serve her, and had been not a little devoted to her, led out of the pains of Purgatory. And Benvenuta was told that he had been delivered by her merits; therefore that happy soul, thus freed from its torments, went up to Benvenuta, and returned the most grateful thanks to her.

The same day she assisted at Vespers in her separate seat where she was accustomed to be. She went into a rapture at the beginning of Vespers which lasted for a long time after, and her body was deprived of sense and motion, for the spirit was not in it. The sisters surrounded her after Vespers, contemplating with reverence and devotion her supernatural condition, which filled her with confusion when she returned to her senses.

Also, on the following morning, when she remained in the room where she slept, her spirit was lifted up in a rapture, which lasted as long as these matins were solemnly chanted. The same thing occurred in the next mass, until the elevation of the Body of the Lord; for her spirit used to return to her a little before the elevation, to adore our Lord, and remain in her until the end of the mass, and this it did in every solemn mass.

The next night, which preceded the feast of St. Jerome, she was in the house where she lived, with some of the sisters, and all except herself and Sister Margaret were sleeping. Benvenuta and Sister Margaret were occupied in prayer. While Benvenuta made a long prostration, her

spirit went into a rapture which Sister Margaret easily perceived. When her spirit returned, her slow sighs showed Sister Margaret that the rapture was ended, and so she went up to her and compelled her to lie down for a little while, dressed as she was. When she laid down, Sister Margaret approached her face to hers, and kissed her with great devotion. And such consolation flowed into her from that kiss, that it seemed that all the consolations of this world were not to be compared to it. This consolation of Sister Margaret's lasted for several days, with a great abundance of tears; and has been more fully described above.

Also, on the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin in the same year, she went into an ecstasy at the first vespers and at the mass. She confided to some, that during the rapture she had been in heaven and seen how those vespers were performed there. Likewise, when the passion was sung in the mass in Holy Week, she was in a rapture, and during those matins in which the Lamentations are sung, her spirit was absent from the body before the eyes of all the sisters.

Likewise, on Holy Thursday, when she was at table with the sisters, as soon as she had tasted a little food, her spirit left her in sight of the whole convent, which inspired much devotion, and some wept. She went into a rapture three times in the presence of many, on seeing some relics of saints. The first was on seeing the relics of St. Dominic, which were put in two ivory reliquaries, and one was placed on the altar of the convent of our

sisters. She twice went into a rapture when she saw a head of one of the eleven thousand virgins who suffered near Cologne. This head was sent to the nuns of the order of Preachers at Friuli, and they keep it with great reverence and devotion.

Once when a novice was received by our sisters during Benvenuta's residence with them, the prioress was with the sisters in chapter, and Benvenuta also; they all stood up while the novice took off her worldly dress and put on the religious habit, and when the hymn Veni Creator was entoned, they saw Benvenuta go into an ecstasy. As the convent went into the church singing the hymn, Benvenuta remained standing in choir, for she was unable to move. Leucardis, the secular lady who lived in the convent, remained by Benvenuta till her spirit returned, which was not for some time, at the end of which she went into the church, and the other sisters followed.

Because the most devout Benvenuta had during the whole course of her life refused the false consolations of this miserable life, therefore, the Lord, the just Judge, allowed her spirit during its raptures to enjoy in heaven a foretaste of that blessed life which will last for ever, where she saw and heard things which it is not lawful to mention. And because from her infancy upwards she had refused to partake of the delights of the flesh, but had, on the contrary, sought after suffering and pain, and had endeavoured to carry about the mortification of Christ always in her

tender body, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ gave her spirit marvellous consolations ; so that she found by experience, that the weaker she was in body, the stronger and more vigorous her spirit became. Moreover, because she never would converse or be familiar with those who love transitory things, and seek after earthly objects ; therefore, the Lord frequently sent the blessed spirits to visit and comfort her—Gabriel and the angels, the saints and most often St. Dominic, and the blessed virgins, especially Catherine, Agnes and Margaret—all which visits brought her unspeakable consolation ; for the consolations of God are pure and refined beyond expression, and are only given to those who shut the door to foreign affections. And lest the magnitude of these consolations should lift her up, the angel of satan, that is to say, the evil spirit, was given her by Divine permission, who appearing visibly to her under different forms, molested her for many years with divers terrors, sometimes with threats and reproaches, sometimes with blows, and sometimes endeavouring in his multiplied warfare to deceive her with fair words and a beautiful form ; but by God's power he was invariably confounded, and retired from all his assaults with loud cries and with shame. Immediately afterwards, the pious Benvenuta was visited by the angels or the saints, and receiving manifold consolations from them, she was left in immense joy and happiness ; for as the passion of Christ abounded in her, so in Jesus did her consolation abound also.

And as her whole life had been spent in the most devout way, which we have described in these few words, she longed to be dissolved and to be with Christ, especially after she had enjoyed, in a rapture in the church, a foretaste of those delights. She did not desire to leave this life in order to fly from the trials of the world, or the pains of the body, or the illnesses by which she was afflicted beyond measure, but, on the contrary, her patience had arrived at such perfection, that after she had been perfectly cured by miracle, I, who have written these things, heard her say, "Behold, I am entirely cured, and it now seems to me that I have never had any illness; but if it pleases God, I am ready to endure again willingly all the diseases which I had before." But the reason she desired to die, was that she might reach those sweetnesses of which she had a foretaste, and that she might return to Him who had made her for Himself, for her heart was uneasy until she returned to Him. She therefore frequently entreated those whom she believed to fear and love God, to pray for her that the Lord might take her from this life, and this she often asked of me, who have written these things. In the same way she used to ask of the angels and saints, who appeared to her very often, as has been described above, to pray to the Lord for her, that He might take her out of this evil world; and they replied that she should wait with patience, for her hour was not yet come. But because holy desires are increased by being deferred, and if they were to fail through long waiting,

they would not be true desires, her longing to be dissolved and to be with Christ grew daily. She had until then made many efforts to bear the exile of our present pilgrimage with greater patience, because she had two great consolations in this life, which she then lost; one was entirely taken away, and she lost the other in part.

One of the greatest consolations which she had in this life, was Father Conrad, her confessor. Nor is this to be wondered at, for, as has been related, it was supernaturally revealed to her by St. Dominic, that Father Conrad had entered the order of Friars Preachers by divine appointment, and was to have the especial charge of her, and she was to be guided by his advice, and to obey him in all things. The Lord had also promised Benvenuta that he should be near her at the end of her life, and should assist at her funeral, so when he was made prior of the convents of Trent and Treviso, she could never rest until he had been released from these offices and sent to the convent of Cividale. This is not surprising, for she had disclosed to him all the wonders which God had worked in her soul, under a promise of secrecy, however, that he should reveal them to no one as long as she lived in this life; and she was in these matters to be guided and directed by him. But now, Father Conrad received letters from the Father Provincial, telling him that he had been elected prior of the convent at Verona, and that he was to go to that convent to exercise this office. Benvenuta was inconsolable at hearing this news.

The second consolation that she had in this world, was being in the church of St. Dominic; thus, if it had been possible, she never would have left it either night or day. This consolation was now partly taken away by two causes; the first was the extreme weakness occasioned by her watchings and abstinences, and some illnesses, which made it very difficult for her to go to the church. The second was, that she had no one who could take her there, for her sister Maria, who was accustomed to accompany her, was prevented from doing so by the care of the house and family, which had now devolved upon her.

CHAPTER X.

SHE DESIRES TO DIE AND HER DESIRE IS GRANTED. THE SIGNS WHICH PRECEDED HER DEATH. HEAVENLY APPARITIONS. HER DEATH. HER FUNERAL AND BURIAL IN THE FAMILY SEPULCHRE BEFORE THE DOORS OF THE CHURCH OF ST. DOMINIC. THE SERMON OF HER CONFESSOR, FATHER CONRAD. HER BROTHER PAUL.

Thus the most pious Benvenuta attained her thirty eighth year, and seeing that no more consolation remained for her in this life, eight days before the feast of St. Simon and St. Jude, as she entered the church of St. Dominic with two devout widows, (one was her sister, who had been the wife of him whom her merits had delivered from the pains of Purgatory, as has been related,

and the other the sister of her faithful Jacobina,) she cast her eyes on the crucifix, and said with much love and desire, in their hearing, "O Lord Jesus Christ, by that precious Blood which Thou didst shed for us sinners on Thy most holy cross, I pray Thee to take me out of this life, if it is expedient for me." When they heard this prayer, made with such affection and desire, they feared lest she should be heard, and her sister said to her, "Do not speak thus, Benvenuta, for I cannot live without you without great desolation." But she answered with a joyful face, "Do not you think that I could help your more if I was with the Lord Jesus Christ in the life of glory, than if I remained with you in this valley of misery?" The other widow said with great grief, "O Benvenuta, do not leave us, for you are the great hope of us all, who love you and are devoted to you, and our chief consolation." But her prayer was heard, for on that very day a pain of the chest attacked her, which did not leave her until death.

In the latter part of that and the preceding night, two sisters of that neighbourhood, who had watched until then, saw a globe of light descend upon the dwelling of this virgin. She went to the church the next morning, though the pain was not less, but on the contrary, much worse; and as she returned home, supported by her sister, her illness became so violent that it was necessary to open her mouth by the way, and she emitted a great quantity of blood. Although her suffering continued to increase, and she continued

to spit blood, which had weakened her very much, she insisted on going to church, both the third and the fourth day. On the fourth day, however, she was compelled to take to her bed, and remained there the two following days as the pain became worse. During this time she devoutly received all the sacraments of the Church, and put all her affairs in order, and chose to be buried in the tomb where the bodies of her father and mother reposed, outside the doors of St. Dominic's church. She was visited in these three days by numbers of pious persons, both religious and secular, who had a great devotion to her.

The night after these three days, when almost all expected her to depart this life, as in effect she did, many devout and pious persons, both religious and secular, were induced to watch by her, through their veneration for her sanctity, that they might be present when her happy soul was separated from the body. About the middle of the night she enquired what time it was, and when she was told that half the night was already passed, she said, "Send for the Fathers for they may be too late, our matins are already rung." Father James, her brother, made haste and came first to her, and after him Father Conrad her confessor, the prior of Verona. They found her sinking but still sensible. The prior of Verona began to comfort her, saying, "Fear nothing, my daughter, but be firm and calm, and say the Credo as well as you can." He then began to pray for her with the fathers who were present, and said the recommendation of the soul after

the usual manner. Benvenuta's widowed sister supported her in her arms, with her head reclining on her breast. She uttered a loud groan, and her countenance darkened, but after a short time her joyful expression returned, and she smiled, and looked round to the right and the left as if she had been quite well, and thus she expired in joy and happiness, on the 30th of October, 1292. This groan and the change of countenance at the hour of her death seems to correspond with a revelation which she obtained by many prayers from the Blessed Virgin.

Benvenuta had frequently heard how the ancient serpent lays snares for the faithful at the hour of their death, tempting their souls with despair and divers terrors when they are about to leave the body, and she desired to know what kind of warfare he would use against her. With this desire she besought the Blessed Virgin for many days to make it known to her. Therefore the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, showing her that the evil spirit would then be seen by her in a most horrible form, and said, "You, however, may be secure, for I will come to your aid without delay, and this which I now tell you, you shall experience this very night."

After the Blessed Virgin's departure the evil spirit presented himself to her in a most frightful form, suggesting horrible fears, and saying that she was damned for having led an indiscreet life, and killing herself before the time. When Benvenuta, in great anguish, called for the help which the Blessed Virgin had promised her, the

evil spirit said, "You call in vain, for it was not the Blessed Virgin, but it was I in her likeness who appeared to you, wishing thus to deceive you." But Benvenuta never ceased to invoke our Blessed Lady, and the devil, after trying to thwart her with these and similar speeches, retired at length in confusion. Then the Blessed Virgin, with her glorious attendants, came and consoled her. Benvenuta had long before told this vision to her Sister Beatrice, a nun, who was standing by her when her happy soul left the body. Her groan was caused by the sight of the demon, and the joy of her countenance flowed from the coming of the Blessed Virgin, and her happy society. She therefore said, "Wait a little while for me," and expired.

Moreover, many years before, on that feast of the Annunciation when she was cured from all her mental and bodily infirmities, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her with several saints, and made her this promise; "I will come to help you in the hour of your death, with all these your patron saints." At the exact moment of her death a very old woman who was entering the doors of the court of Benvenuta's house, saw a flame like a burning torch rise from the house, and descend upon St. Dominic's church.

Then arose weeping and lamentation from all her relations and religious friends, and the numerous persons who had assembled out of devotion to witness her happy death. Among them was one of her nephews, the son of that sister in whose arms she had given up the ghost, and

of her brother-in-law whom she had freed, as has been related, from Purgatory, who threw himself upon the corpse with loud cries, and broke into such a flood of tears, that a quantity of blood burst from his nose, and he was cured from a hemicrania which he had suffered for several years, nor did it ever return to molest him. Our fathers, who had assisted at her death-bed because she had belonged to St. Dominic's Militia of Jesus Christ, as it was called at that time, and was a Sister of Penance of St. Dominic, wished that she should be buried the same day, but it was put off at the entreaties of her brother Paul and her Sister Maria, whose love made them seek to satiate themselves with the presence of her corpse, and to have time to make more preparations for her funeral. It therefore remained at the house that day.

Many members of the highest families of Cividale, and many noble ladies, as well as many of the common people of the neighbourhood, came that day to make a visit of devotion to Benvenuta's most holy body, and kissed it with many tears, and touched it with rings, Paternosters, and such other things as men carry about with them, that from that touch they might receive virtue and holiness. Our friars sung the Office of the Dead over her. When the nuns of the Great Monastery heard that she was visited by every one with such great devotion, many of them begged the abbess to give them permission to visit the holy body before it was buried. And since this request was made by a great

number of the nuns, the abbess said, "We will all go, and I will accompany you." Thus the Lady Abbess, with all her monastery, went to the house of Benvenuta. After they had reverently touched and kissed the holy body, they sung the Office of the Dead, with the addition of the Salve Regina. When the prior of the Friars Preachers heard that the abbess with all her nuns was there, and a great multitude of people, he came in procession with his whole convent, to carry the body of Benvenuta to the church of St. Dominic. All things being prepared they took the body in procession to the church, the Lady Abbess following them with her procession, and after them the bier, and a great concourse of people. When the holy body was placed in the church, and the Office of the Dead with Vespers was finished, those who were not going to pass the night beside the corpse returned to their homes.

The following morning an immense number of people returned to the church. Father Conrad the prior of Verona said Mass and preached. And because there was no time to prolong the discourse, he spoke for a short time in general of her sanctity, and related two miracles in particular; namely, how St. Dominic appeared to her on the night of the Annunciation, and foretold that on that day she would be cured by his merits from all her infirmities of mind and body, which was fulfilled that day by a stupendous miracle, when, after Benvenuta had received the Body of Christ, the Blessed Dominic appeared to her,

and led her through the middle of the choir to the steps of the high altar which was consecrated to him. When she had lain prostrate upon them for a little while, she rose up healed from all infirmity of mind and body.

The other miracle which he related was how she had girt herself with a rope for two years, which had entered so deep into her flesh that it could not be removed without making an incision, and she did not wish to reveal it to any one. Therefore she sought the help of God, and fled to the safe refuge of prayer, and when her spirit, which had been in a rapture during her prayer, returned to the body, she found that same rope lying before her on the ground, as entire as it had been whilst she wore it. Many men and women however of Cividale, knowing that Father Conrad had for a long time been in Benvenuta's confidence and her confessor, and that he had known many of the secrets of her sanctity, which he could not disclose during her lifetime because of his promise of secrecy, now that she was dead, and that he was released from this engagement, desired to hear from him the wonderful works of God in her regard, before he left the convent to go to his priorate. Therefore a sermon was fixed for the following Sunday, and the greatest part of the city came to hear it, so that the church was much crowded. In this sermon, after having discoursed upon some of the great graces and virtues which the Lord had conferred upon Benvenuta, he related three singular ones which are very great and uncommon to those who are in this mortal life.

The first was that great prodigy by which the Archangel Gabriel nourished her for five years, not with earthly, but with heavenly food, for she hardly touched food once in a week, and then only at the entreaty of the assistants, for she well knew that she had no need of it. And though that food was in such a small quantity that it would hardly suffice to feed a small bird for one day, she used to reject it all after the space of an hour. The Angel Gabriel descended daily from heaven about the ninth hour, carrying a bright vase in his hand, and three times in the day he used to take out the contents with his fingers, and place them in Benvenuta's mouth, and upon this food she lived. Nor did any one ever see her partake of any food during the whole of that time which she was able to retain, except the Body of Christ which she always retained; but when she drank pure water she retained it.

The second fact which he mentioned, was that the evil spirit appeared to her many times in some visible form, and twice, as she had been instructed, she cast him down before her, placing her foot on his neck, said, "Prostrate yourself, most vile demon, under the foot of a weak woman;" and the devil answered, "Alas! I shall not dare to appear before him who sent me; suffer me to go, and I promise never again to molest you."

The third prodigy was this, her delivering from Purgatory at the prior's own request, the soul of his brother who had lately died, by her merits and prayers. The dead man afterwards appeared

to her, and thanked her humbly. But these three things have been more fully described above. And the promise which Benvenuta had received from God was fulfilled, and the expectation of Father Conrad based upon this revelation of Benvenuta's was accomplished, namely, that wherever he might be sent to, he would be near Benvenuta in the hour of her death, and commit her body to the grave.

CHAPTER XI.

TORCHES AND LIGHTS MIRACULOUSLY BURNING ROUND HER TOMB. MIRACULOUS CURES. MIRACLES WORKED BY HER IN THE MONASTERY OF CELLA, AND IN THE GREAT MONASTERY OF THE BENEDICTINE NUNS.

And as from her infancy until her death, the life of the most pious Benvenuta was full of wonders, so after her decease, the Lord Jesus Christ confirmed the truth of her sanctity by miracles of heavenly lights, and miracles of healing.

She was buried on the vigil of All Saints. The following night, although it rained heavily, three sisters of our order, who belonged to the monastery at Cividale, namely, Sister Nicholotta, who is now prioress, Sister Margaret, and Sister Magdalen, saw great lights shine during the principal part of the night on the façade of the church above Benvenuta's tomb, which is without the

doors of the church. The dormitory of our sisters in that monastery is so arranged, that the sisters who inhabit the cells of the side nearest the cloister, can see the façade and our whole church. And those lights which appear there, have no resemblance to the lights and flames of material fire, for they have no reddish tints, nor any smoke, but they have a glittering splendour of silvery whiteness. Smaller lights, besides, glisten in the large ones, which like flaming banners are discerned among them, by the greater brightness of their rays, and the greater rapidity of their motion.

Also, after matins one Saturday, which day by the advice of the Blessed Virgin Benvenuta used to honour with particular devotion, Sister Mathilda, of the monastery of our sisters, said that she saw, as it were, two flaming banners before the front of our church, which diffused not a little splendour all round, and moved slowly here and there along the walls of our church, and disappeared after a considerable space of time. But after a short interval another blaze of light broke forth, which was so large, that it hid the whole church, and so brilliant that the church seemed on fire; which glory also lasted for a considerable time, and the sister was infinitely consoled by the vision.

Moreover, on another night, the same sister, with another nun of that convent, named Eusebia, saw a great light round the church, and it seemed that the principal light was within it, so that the roof shone like glass, and appeared all shining. Also, on Holy Saturday, the same Sister Mathil-

saw a great light before the front of the church over her sepulchre. She and Sister Magdalen saw this repeated on Trinity Sunday, and likewise on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and on the octave of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Thus, on another night, Sister Eusebia saw an immense brightness in that spot, and within the great light there was another in the likeness of a flaming banner, and this splendour was visible to her five times in one night.

Likewise, in the night of St. Thomas the Martyr, sister Eusebia saw such an intense light above the dwelling of the fathers, that their whole dwelling seemed on fire, and two other lights proceeded from that one, in the form of blazing banners. On another night, Sister Weremburg, formerly prioress, Sister Margaret, and Sister Nicholotta, who is now sub-prioress, Sister Mathilda, and several other sisters, all saw a great light over her sepulchre. Another time several sisters together saw a great light near the church, and the same night Sister Weremburg and Sister Leoncina saw the same repeated three times. Sister Wilburgis also twice saw a great light there on the feast of St. Dominic. It was repeated on the nights of the two following Saturdays, although it rained heavily at the time. On Holy Thursday, when the night was far advanced, Sister Gisla saw a great light before the church moving to three places, and pausing a little while in each. This light was also seen by twelve or thirteen secular persons both men and women, who were under the porticoes of the houses facing our stone

bridge, as we will relate further on. Sister Wilborgis saw the same light on the feast of St. Luke, and Sister Eusebia also saw it the second night after the feast of the eleven thousand virgins. These were not only seen by the above-mentioned religious, but by many persons in the world, principally by those who inhabited the houses which are only separated from the face of our church by our stone bridge.

Some women who live in those houses saw a great light shining over Benvenuta's tomb on the seventh day after her funeral. Also, on the thirteenth day after it, which was the feast of St. Andrew, they saw it again, and three of them went to the grate, which is at the entrance of the cemetery, and although they stood there in the rain as long a time as it would take to say one hundred Hail Marys, while the light lasted, in spite of the rain, they asserted that their clothes were not even damp when they returned.

On the feast of St. Anthony the hermit, many women who were under the porches of those houses, saw an unusually bright light above the sepulchre, and three women in white standing by it. One who seemed greater than the others was in the middle, the other two stood at the head and at the foot of it, and they were all three raised a cubit from the ground; and although it was so late in the night, the doors of the church were open, and those two who stood at the ends of the tomb went into the church, while she who had the middle place remained in. After all these things

had lasted for some space of time, they disappeared and were never again seen.

Further, on Holy Thursday of the next year, 1293, a wonderful prodigy of light appeared. From the rose window of our church there issued a light which spread itself so that the air which was at that time very dark and filled with rain, became so clear that men could discern a piece of money lying on the ground, and this light remained a long time before our church. Then passing through our wood it went towards St. Peter's and the house of Benvenuta, and while it remained there it appeared as if one large house was burning, and a silvery light rose from it. It returned to the convent of the Friars Preachers, and disappeared after making the circuit of the Dormitory, the burial ground of the Brothers and the whole Church. This was seen by many men and women who were in the porches of the houses opposite the church of the Friars Preachers ; some were standing there when it first appeared, others were called from their beds to see it. It was also witnessed by sister Gisla from her cell, as we have already described. Many more lights were seen by other religious and secular persons about the church, and her tomb, and the house she had formerly inhabited, and are still seen at times, but it would take too long to record them severally.

NOTE.—The family of Bojan subsequently changed their sepulchre, and after the year 1492, were buried within the church. The old sepulchre outside the doors was hidden by earth and stones.

The body of Benvenuta was repeatedly sought for with the greatest anxiety, in order that it might be removed to a more suitable place, but it could never be found. A document on this subject says

"In the year of our Lord, 1447, on the 27th day of May, the tomb which is immediately in front of the doors of the church of St. Dominic, in which it is said that the holy Benvenuta was buried, was opened, and her body was not found. In it there were six heads, and all the bodies were reduced to dust and ashes. There were present at the aforesaid opening, Ser Francisca de Virgiliis, Procurator of the Commonwealth of Cividale, Ser Conrado de Bojan, Ser Nicolao de Portis, Ser Martino de Santo Daniele, Maestro Leonardo of Udine of the Order of Preachers, Fra Pietro of Ancona, Prior of the Convent of St. Dominic of Cividale, Fra Bartolommeo di Fermo, Lector of the convent of Cividale, Fra Hectore de Udine, and other fathers of the aforesaid convent.....I, the aforesaid Maestro Leonardo, have written this with my own hand."

After near two centuries the remains of Benvenuta were sought for with greater diligence, but they were not found. Bernardino Gosellino left to posterity the following account of this search:— "1609, February 16. In the one thousand six hundred and ninth year after the birth of the Virgin's Child, on the fourteenth of the Calends of March. Since we had many proofs that the blessed Benvenuta de Bojan of Friuli, a virgin of the third order of the holy Father St. Dominic, had been laid in the tomb of her parents, which is without the great door of the church, having first, during eight days offered many prayers to God, and recited the psalter of David, which Fra Constantius of Fabriano of our order of Preachers said to be most efficacious in obtaining those favours which we seek at the hands of the Divine Majesty; and having recited the hymn Magnificat nine times, which we read that that blessed Fra Aloysius Beltrando, of Valentia, whom we hope soon to venerate as a canonised saint, was accustomed to say in order to find lost things, and which frequently proved its efficacy by heavenly miracles, and having further invoked the aid of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, that she might use her influence with her Son, and that by her prayers and intercession we might more easily find the most precious treasure of the relics of Benvenuta, having this intention before our eyes, namely, that of promoting the honour and glory of God, and His handmaid, Benvenuta; we commenced digging in front of the great doors. When the stone sepulchre was laid open by the removal of the flags which covered it, it was found to contain nothing but seven or eight heads of dead persons, a great many bones, two girdles of gold, and as many of silk, which were all finally replaced, and we praised the blessed God, whose will we suppose it to be that the bones of Benvenuta should lie hid until the day of the last judgment. There were present at the opening of the sepulchre, the Reverend Father George de Longis of Udine, the worthy Prior of the Convent, Father George Bavio, of Feltri, and Father Dominic, of Venice, Professed Novices, and Father Bernardino Gosellino, Lector, who have written these things, and many others, whose names I omit for fear of prolixity."

Gosellino further adds that "the Lord Frederic de Bojan believes that the body of Benvenuta is at Bologna, and states that it was taken by a Friar of our Order shortly after it had been placed in the tomb, and carried to that town and convent." The author must answer for the truth of this statement. Marco Antonio Nicholetti asserts that it was taken to Ravenna, but has only the authority of a popular belief.

THE LIFE

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B. CATHERINE OF RACONIGI,

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Raconigi, a city of Piedmont, was the birth-place of the blessed Catherine, whose glorious life we hope with the aid of God, to relate. This virgin was born in the month of June, in the year of our redemption, 1486. Her father was called George Mattei, and her mother's name was Biblia de Ferrari. When she was born, her mother found herself unable to give her suck, and as she could not afford to pay a nurse, she used to make one of her little brothers carry her about the town to her most intimate friends and neighbours, to see if they would give her some milk. The reason of her parents' poverty and distress, was that their country had been recently sacked and plundered, because the lord of it had allied himself with the Marquis of Saluzzo, against whom the Duke of Savoy was waging a cruel war.

Not to mention other painful misfortunes, the roof of their house had been destroyed, so that the

rain, the snow, and the cold, entered at all times into this poor habitation. The blessed child was thus brought up in poverty, and often suffered from want, but she bore all with patience, and although she was so young, showed signs of her future sanctity. When she had attained the age of five years, it came to pass one Sunday, that a white dove descended into her room, and flew straight to her right shoulder, at which she was startled, and fearing some deceit of the enemy of mankind, made the sign of the holy cross and invoked the name of Jesus; and at that moment a ray of wondrous splendour issued from the mouth of the dove, which fell on her mouth, and she heard a voice say to her, "My daughter, receive and drink this wine, and by its power thou shalt never hunger or thirst after anything in the world, but thou shalt, on the contrary, have a growing hunger and a great thirst for the honour of God, and for the salvation of the souls which have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and thou shalt renounce thine own will."

As soon as she was fourteen years old, seeing that many snares were prepared for her, and that many would seek to make her lose the flower of her virginity, she perceived that she stood in great need of particular assistance. For this reason she frequently had recourse to the help of the saints, and especially of those whose feasts were being celebrated, that she might more easily obtain what she desired. In order to find consolation in her troubles, on St. Stephen's day, the blessed Catherine rose before dawn to pray, and

while she implored the holy protomartyr to preserve her virginity, and represented to him that the apostles had given him the charge and the care of women, and she was of that sex, and a frail virgin, the holy Martyr appeared to her, his face beaming with great joy, and said, "My daughter, be of good courage, for thy prayers are heard, and thou shalt be free from temptations of the flesh. Nothing now is wanting but that thou shouldst prepare thyself well for receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit." When he had finished speaking, an immense and admirable light, with three rays, descended visibly upon her, and communicated a sweet fervour to her soul, and it seemed as if her interior boiled like a vessel in a furnace. She heard a loud voice, which sounded like a trumpet, say, "I am come to dwell in thee, and to purge, illuminate, enkindle, and animate thy soul." She was so terrified by this, that she fell motionless on the ground, but as soon as her strength was restored to her, she felt full of joy of soul, and she returned special thanks to God, and to her advocate St. Stephen, the protomartyr. Ever afterwards she bore on her face a certain white splendour, mingled with red, so that her neighbours wondered at it, and thinking that she used paint or other artifices, asked her how she made herself so beautiful, and she used to answer, smiling, that she only used bread, but her secret meaning was that the brightness and glory of her face proceeded from the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and the grace of the Holy Ghost.

On the feast of Pentecost, in her twenty-first

year, when she was praying in her cell with the door closed, the Holy Spirit descended upon her in the form of a very bright cloud. It was then that the fervour of Divine charity indeed increased in her, and zeal for the honour of God, and the salvation of souls; and a greater and clearer knowledge of divine things was supernaturally planted in her soul. Two years after this day, which was so happy for her, on the same feast of Pentecost, this spouse of Christ was shut up in her oratory at the hour of tierce, contemplating the great gift which had been given on that day to the apostles, and the wonderful effects which it produced, and considering while she thanked God for His mercy, that every soul which is come to years of reason, may, by serving God in purity and innocence, make itself worthy of so great a grace, as it happened to the apostles, who, by their own testimony and confession, were the refuse and the outcasts of the world, and who on this day were ennobled and raised to such dignity, that they are called with reason the princes of the earth.

While the blessed Catherine was occupied with these thoughts, two angels, and with them St. Peter Martyr and St. Catherine of Sienna, all of whom were her guardians, appeared, and exhorted her to prepare herself to receive a more abundant grace from the Holy Spirit. She made her confession to St. Peter Martyr, as no other confessor was then at hand, and as soon as he had given her absolution, a loud noise was heard, and the oratory was filled with such a shining light, that it seemed as if everything would be burnt. The

virgin fell on the ground from sudden fear, but St. Catherine of Sienna lifted her up, and raising her eyes, she beheld a large globe of fire from which proceeded seven tongues, which penetrated to the bottom of her heart. At this moment she saw the Eternal Father in an ineffable manner, and the ardour of her charity grew to such a degree that she was surprised by the desire of suffering torments, and even of dying, if it were necessary, for the glory of God and the salvation of her neighbour. She felt so full of courage after this increase of heavenly grace, that if an opportunity had presented itself, she would have gone to preach and to announce Christ's Name to the heathen and infidels. She, moreover, received on that day great understanding, which enabled her to distinguish true visions from false ones.

We have now related how this blessed Catherine received the Holy Spirit in four different ways, and at different periods. The first time He came in the form of a dove, when she was only five years old; the second time in her fifteenth year, in the form of three resplendent rays; the third when she was twenty, under the figure of a shining cloud; and lastly, when she was twenty-two, with the appearance of tongues of fire.

In order to show more evidently the great holiness of this blessed child, and how wonderfully she was prevented by heaven, we will go back to the period of the first descent of the Holy Spirit, and describe her espousals with Jesus Christ, which followed that event. On the feast

of Pentecost, in the year 1491, when she was five years old, the glorious Virgin Mother of God appeared to her, clothed in a beautiful white robe, and over it a black mantle, ornamented in front with one precious stone resembling a ruby which shone like the sun; she wore a garland on her head which gave forth rays as if it were made of stars, and shone most brightly over her ears. Her salutation was, "The Name of Jesus Christ be engraved on thy heart, my dear daughter." When the timid girl heard these words, she replied, "How did you come in when my door was shut, and who are you?" "I am," answered our glorious Lady, "the Mother of Jesus Christ thy Saviour and thy Redeemer; therefore do not fear. It is my will that thou shouldest give thyself, and all that thou mayest have, to my dear Son." Catherine said, "Where is thy Son, my sweet Saviour and Redeemer?" The Queen of Angels said, "He will come shortly;" and continued, "Thou must know that in the cold winter season the beauty of the plants fades and withers, and no flowers, or fruits, or leaves, can be found on them, for the trees are dry and bare. Such would be thy state without the grace of my dear Son, God and Man, who is the true Sun of Justice. Therefore, I wish thee to be joined to Him by love, and to give thyself to Him with all that thou hast, and so shall all thy works be like so much good fruit which thy tree bears, good and ripe fruit, which shall please the Divine Majesty." Then the virgin Catherine answered, "Alas, my dear Lady, I am very poor, and have nothing

in the world to give to this thy dear Son." The heavenly Queen replied, "My dear child, my Son only wishes for thy heart." "I do not know," said Catherine, "where my heart is; but if you find it for me, I will very willingly make Him a present of it." Then the Queen of Angels, smiling at her simplicity, placed her hand on the heart of Catherine, and said, "This is the place of thy heart, which thou must now give Him for a present, with a ready intention of keeping His holy commandments, and enduring all hardships for the love of Him." Here Jesus Christ appeared in the form of a little child, about Catherine's own age, with a red and white complexion, clothed in a white tunic ornamented with gold round the neck, and an Agnus Dei hanging to it, with an image of our Lady of Compassion upon it. The Divine Child was accompanied by a great many angels and saints, among whom were a seraphim with six wings, St. Jerome, St. Peter Martyr, and St. Catherine of Sienna. Then the Queen of heaven took her Son Jesus and turned towards Catherine, and said, "Here is my dearest Son, thy Lord and thy Redeemer, whom I now wish thee to accept for a dear spouse." The young girl trembled, and said, "My dear Lady, I should never dare to do such a thing;" but the Queen comforted her, saying, "Do not fear, my daughter, for it is my wish; and it shall be my Jesus who will be henceforward the protector and the true guardian of thy sacred virginity." Thus the happy child consented to these spiritual espousals, and our Lady turned to her Son Jesus

Christ, and said, "I desire, my dear Son, that Thou shouldst take and receive Catherine for Thy spouse," to which He gave His consent with great joy, because Catherine was one of the jewels which He bought with His precious blood; and the Virgin of virgins took from the little finger of her left hand a ring of twisted and reddish gold, in which there was a very large and very beautiful pearl, and gave it to her little Jesus; then holding both their hands, she married the happy Catherine to her dear Child Jesus Christ, who placed the ring on her finger with these words, "I take thee for my spouse in faith, hope, and charity." After this He exhorted His bride to study to please Him in all things, and to try to be humble, meek and gentle of heart, persevering in patience, in adversity, as she had done before, and measuring her will in all things and by all things with His, for He was from that hour her legitimate Spouse. He then turned to His Mother, and said, "I wish thee to adopt my bride for thy dear daughter, and to take charge of her." He also commanded the seraphim to watch over her and never to abandon her any more than the angel who was assigned to her from the moment of her birth; lastly, addressing Himself to His dear spouse, he said, "Because thou art yet a tender and delicate girl, and hast no experience, I give thee for masters and teachers, Jerome, Peter Martyr, and Catherine of Sienna, who shall after my dear Mother also be a mother to thee, and Peter Martyr shall be thy father."

Jesus Christ, desiring to unite the Blessed Catherine to Him by a closer bond, espoused her a second time twenty years after this event, on the 10th of September, with a very precious ring, in which was set a stone like a ruby, surrounded by four large pearls, in the form of a cross, and on the stone was engraved *Fides.** In the same year, on the feast of Christmas, this Blessed Catherine was again espoused for the third and last time, with a gold ring which had a white stone, and these words engraved round it, *Dies regis.*† At this solemnity the most Blessed Virgin assisted, as well as St. Joseph, St. John the Evangelist, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Jerome, St. Dominic, St. Peter Martyr, and St. Catherine of Sienna, who, as having particular charge of her, had been present at all these acts. We must not neglect to say how, before her espousal on this Christmas, when Catherine was contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation she was raised in spirit, and conducted by the seraphim, who had been appointed her guardian, to the holy cradle of Jesus Christ at Bethlehem, and there she merited to see the Infant Jesus, to take Him in her arms, and to kiss Him with devotion and inexpressible affection, saying these, or similar words, while the sighs and sobs which came from the bottom of her heart, revealed the grief of charity which perpetually burned her interior: "O my hope, O my sweet refreshment, O dear Spouse of my soul, how many marks of love hast

* Viz., Faith.

† Viz., the day of the King.

Thou not shown to me, a miserable creature, full of ignorance and ingratitude."

In the year 1512, on the 3rd of August, at the hour of Prime, while this dear spouse was shedding a flood of tears before God, while she prayed Him to give her a pure and clean heart, Jesus Christ appeared to her, accompanied by several saints, and after He had blessed her and spoken of many great mysteries, which she never would manifest to any one, He took her heart, which was all earthly and drooping, except in one place, where *Jesus spes mea* was inscribed in letters of silver, and after cleansing and purifying it, and changing the silver letters into letters of gold, He replaced it. On the feast of St. Maurice, in the same year, Jesus Christ appeared anew to this virgin under the appearance of a crucifix. His wounds shone brighter than the material sun which gives light to the world, and He spoke these words, "Great is the desire, My spouse, that thou hast of binding and uniting thyself to Me, and of transforming thyself into Me, and behold it is also My intention to dwell in the midst of thy heart." Thus in the form of a crucifix He entered her heart, saying, "This is My house, this is My abode; I have chosen it, and I will henceforward live in it." The Blessed Catherine's soul was filled with unspeakable joy and gladness, and at the same time she felt a violent pain.

In 1513, on the day of St. Catherine the Martyr, when our virgin was elevated in spirit and meditating on the constancy that the holy martyrs

of old have showed, and their love for Jesus Christ, and while she piously reflected on her own ingratitude and tepidity, she moreover, on whom such especial graces had been showered, Jesus Christ appeared to her in the company of His holy Mother, St. Catherine Virgin and Martyr, and many other saints, and with His own hands took out her heart for the second time, leaving her as if she were dead, and in great suffering for the space of ten days, at the end of which He restored it to her, cleaner and purer than before. The desire of suffering that she felt from this time was so great for the love that she bore to Jesus that there was no affliction, however great, which she would have thought hard or insupportable. During that period she was led by her guardian seraphim to see a wheel divided into four parts, and she was told that her heart was to be separated into so many portions.

When this virgin was praying the Spouse of her soul, to punish her for the sins of the world, and to put a stop to the ruin of countries and of souls, foreshadowed by the broken wheel which she had seen, Jesus Christ stood before her, and taking out her heart a third time, divided it into four parts, with a knife, describing thus a cross, and on each part was written *Jesus spes mea.** Catherine remained in great pain and as if she were dead, for her heart had been taken from her. After this, if any questions were put to her, she only answered that they should leave her alone for she

* Jesus my hope.

herself did not know what she said, as she had no heart. After seven days, Jesus Christ reappeared and restored her heart to her, which had been thus divided. She always refused to explain the mystery of the four wounds, and only told her most confidential friends that she would have to endure four great tribulations in the course of time, to purge her soul, from the devils, from her enemies, from the tepid, and from those who murmured against and calumniated her. Some years afterwards at the time that the Church celebrated the festival of our Lord's ascension into heaven, on the 4th day of May, in the year of our salvation, 1516, when Catherine prayed and meditated on the glory of Jesus Christ ascending up to heaven, she began to long that her heart could also ascend with Jesus, and she said, "O sweet Jesus Christ, my hope, O living flame of love, since Thou hast so burnt my heart, grant me also this favour of giving me strength to bear such a furnace of love, and give drink to me, to whom Thou hast given the desire of this thirst, for if Thou dost not, my heart is in danger of fainting, and my courage of failing, for want of strength to persevere." Then Jesus Christ stood before her and took away her heart for the fourth time, and retained it for forty-five days; and all this time the Blessed Catherine lived without a heart, and the wound in her side was so open that the air went and came through it.

On the day of St. John Baptist her two guardian angels came to tell her to prepare herself, for the Saviour of the world was coming to restore

her heart to her. She made this answer: "How is it possible that I should make myself fit for the Divine presence, for I have nothing in me. Alas, blessed angels, I am not anxious that He should restore my heart to me, on the contrary I desire that He should keep it altogether as a thing which belongs to Him, for I have freely made him a gift of it." As soon as she had finished speaking she perceived her Divine Spouse, and she threw herself on the ground with her arms in the form of a cross, and adored Him reverently, and her dear Spouse raised her up, and placing His left hand on her left shoulder, put her heart back in its own place, with His right hand, while He comforted her with these words: "Thou knowest, my dearest Spouse, that I am the Eternal Wisdom, and He who hath made and moulded all things, and it depends on My will and power to make and renew the hearts of My friends and of My elect. Behold I now return to thee this thy heart which thou hast so often given and offered to Me, far purer and more ardent, and entirely reformed." Thenceforward the happy Catherine understood the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, though she was not able to explain it thoroughly, seeing that in her youth she had attended rather to the happy mystery of the Incarnation, since that was the beginning of all our good.

Three years after this wonderful event, when the year 1519 had begun, in the month of March, when Catherine was at table, towards the evening, with the person with whom she lodged, who wore the same habit, she was suddenly attacked by

pains of body and trouble of spirit so great that it is impossible to imagine worse. She always desired to suffer for the salvation of souls, and especially at that time which was one of the days of the Carnival, during which Christians become so foolish and senseless. Thus as she sat at table, she saw two angels in robes of the purest white enter the room, girded and armed with knives, whose handles terminated in small crosses. A sudden and vehement desire was kindled in her mind, and in fear and trembling she retired to her own little room, and as soon as she entered it she saw, after the angels who had followed her there, Jesus Christ in a white robe, who spoke in secret for a little while, and then approached nearer to her, and turning aside His face like one who feels compassion for the pains of others, took her heart out of her chest for the fifth time, and gave it to the angels, who made twelve large wounds in it with their knives. The Vicar of the Convent of St. Dominic, her own confessor and some of her most intimate and confidential companions, were in the same room and they all noticed her actions, which showed the pain she was suffering, and heard her lamentations though they saw nothing more. She told one of her familiar friends some time afterwards that her heart bled in large drops under the hands of the angels who wounded it, and that some of these drops fell upon several of the souls in purgatory, and on some other souls who were not yet freed from this earthly prison. She said that she had never felt such intense pain and she did not think that the agonies of death

would be worse. At length Jesus took Catherine's heart from the angels, and after He had perfectly healed it by His Divine power, He put it back in its proper place.

Once, when she was seven years old, she walked through the cloister of the Servite Fathers at Raconigi, and seeing on the wall a picture of St. Peter Martyr, with the wounds which he had borne for the love of Christ, and a palm in his hand, she was pierced with the desire of holy martyrdom which lasted the remainder of her life. So one day when she was praying with this intention to the holy martyr, St. Peter appeared to her in immense splendour with a chalice full of blood in his hand, which he presented to her, saying, "Take this chalice, my daughter, and taste its precious contents, for thou also shalt drink in time the cup of much tribulation." The virgin, fearing the snares of the enemy, committed her cause to her most beloved Spouse Jesus Christ, praying that He would never abandon her nor permit her to be deceived. Then Jesus Christ appeared to her in the form of a child of ten years, with a cross on his shoulders, and spoke to her as follows: "My dear Spouse, do not let what thou hast just seen give the smallest fear, for this is My faithful servant Peter Martyr, whom I have before assigned thee as a master and a teacher. And neither more nor less than he has done, who for the great love which he bore Me, and his great zeal for My faith drank the chalice of My bitter passion, shalt thou for My love and for the zeal of the souls redeemed by My precious blood endure many

great trials and afflictions." He then placed the cross on her left shoulder and said, "It will seem hard and bitter at first, but in the end it will become sweet and pliable, because of My love which makes heavy things seem light"

Another time, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Jesus Christ appeared to her preceded by two angels, who carried a large cross, which He took from the angels in Catherine's presence, and placed it on her left shoulder for the second time, saying, "This is the cross, my dear Spouse, which shall never forsake thee as long as thou livest. I give it thee now, for it becomes a Spouse who loves his dear Spouse very faithfully to make her a present; it will seem rather hard at first, but in the end will be very glorious." When the virgin received this cross she felt excessive pain, and it weighed so heavily on her shoulder that from that time she carried that side considerably lower than the other; but she was nevertheless consoled when she saw another cross of gold enriched with precious pearls and brilliant jewels, which was to succeed to the first, which seemed so heavy and burdensome.

Another time, which was the third, she received the cross in the shape of a staff from the hands of Jesus Christ, with these words, "With this staff thou shalt conquer by thy patience all the troubles and adversities which shall come upon thee in the remainder of thy life." She said, "Alas! my sweet Saviour, my hope and the true comfort of my soul, and the gentle refreshment of my heart, I have borne and I will willingly bear Thy

cross for Thy sole glory, trusting in Thy goodness and Thy aid, for I am very sure that Thou wilt never abandon me." After having received these three crosses, when this virgin was praying on the night of St. Nicholas's feast, two angels sent by God appeared to her, all shining and glorious, and presented her with a stole covered with crosses, with which they girded her shoulders and both her arms.

In the twenty-fourth year of her age, at the dawn of the second day after Easter, when the Blessed Catherine was contemplating the mystery of our Lord's prayer in the garden, full of a very great desire of suffering something for love of Him, her heavenly Spouse appeared to her with a banner in His hands, clothed only in a red robe, but all surrounded by glory. He approached His dear Spouse uttering most loving words, and made her the gift of His holy wounds, in the hands, feet, and side. She saw something that resembled a thorn of blood issue from the hands and feet and side of Jesus Christ, and pierce hers. The great pain which she endured in this action left her fainting and insensible as if she were dead, but when she returned to her senses the importunity of her humble and fervent prayers gained for her the privilege of their being invisible to all. She moreover received the crown of thorns from the top of the head to the nape of the neck which had hollowed such a deep circle in the bone, that it was large enough to hold a child's least finger. Some marks of coagulated blood were visible in some places, which she showed to some of her

familiar companions when they pressed her to do so, and the Count, who wrote her life in Latin, ingenuously confesses that the goodness and affability of Catherine had alone made him worthy to see them.

This blessed virgin was of a middle stature, her face was not remarkable for beauty or for ugliness, her complexion was white and red, her nose was rather long, but that did not spoil her countenance, her eyes were very large, their colour was between brown and black, and she had a black spot on her right cheek. Her beauty pleased many persons whom she avoided because she was averse to earthly love, and she was often urged by several young men with lascivious words to lose her virginity, over which she was victorious, with the help of the sweet breath of the grace of God, who never permitted her to lose the fair flower of her chastity, and the purity of her soul.

In the year of our salvation, 1512, on the 11th of April, in the twenty-eight year of her age, after a war against her spirit and her flesh, which was the most violent that she ever endured, Jesus Christ appeared to her with a joyful and smiling countenance, and spoke to her in the following manner, "Doubt nothing, and fear nothing, my dear spouse, for I shall be always with thee, and will cover thee with the mantle of My protection." She then prostrated herself on the ground before the Majesty of her God, saying, "My dear spouse, why did You abandon me so long in such great labours and afflictions? Alas, I was all alone in a very deep sea, without either oars or sails. I

thought that the wind was contrary, and that I could not reach the harbour of my holy desires. Woe is me, woe is me, unhappy that I am, I fear that I must have fallen in something that offends Thy Divine Majesty." Her beloved Spouse answered, "Do not fear, my gentle spouse, for you have not fallen in anything from My grace; on the contrary, you have fought manfully, and triumphed with glory over all the temptations which seemed to rain on to thy head; and since thou hast elected and chosen Me for thy hope, which I am in truth and deed, I have never forsaken thee, but as I have told thee many times, I was in the closet of thy heart, always strengthening thy desire of preserving inviolate the fair and immortal lily of virginity." As soon as her loved Spouse had spoken these words to her, four most beautiful angels appeared, and two of them girded her waist, saying, "We gird thee in God's Name with the cincture of chastity which shall never be unloosed." She fell down as one dead with the pain which this girdle gave her, but in the same moment she was consoled by the presence of Jesus Christ, who offered her His open side, and from that time forward she lived like one who had drunk of the nectar of God, who was her dear spouse, and was so inebriated with divine love, that she never more felt the ebullitions of carnal temptations; and her purity was so great that it shone and overflowed upon those who had the happiness of knowing her familiarly, or of speaking to her, or even of simply seeing her.

Now it must be known that, besides the good angel whom the Blessed Catherine had from the moment of her birth, a seraphim with six wings was given to her, as we have said. And although it is an ancient opinion of St. Denis, followed by St. Thomas Aquinas, that the four superior orders of angels are never sent on earth, but always remain in the presence of the most Holy Trinity, we can still justify our former assertion by saying that this angel was not one of the supreme hierarchy, but that he represented an angel of this order, and performed the office of a seraphim. This supposition is confirmed by what we read of a seraphim having been sent to Isaias. Besides, if the Lord of the seraphims, the Son of God, does not disdain to descend here below to men, what impropriety would there be in asserting that a seraphim had done the same, by a particular grace and privilege granted to some friend or favourite of God? Therefore whether it was a true seraphim or some inferior angel thus for some reason named, he had particular charge of the spouse of Jesus Christ, and used to converse familiarly with her as one friend will do with another. Her guardian-angel usually wore a white robe when he appeared to her, but the seraphim's clothes were red; and as he belonged to a higher order he had more majesty, and something greater in his appearance.

Once when this blessed virgin was ill she felt a repugnance to eating any kind of meat, and only desired to have some bitter berries. It was in January, when it was naturally impossible to

find any of them in that country and at that season, but she nevertheless obtained all that she desired, as she herself related to Count John Francis Picus, Lord of Mirandole. The seraphim brought a little branch of this plant to her in her room, but the berries were so large and fine that she divided each of them into three pieces, and they were so agreeable and wholesome that they completely restored her health. This virgin was very familiar with many other angels of different orders, but these two were constantly with her, and she saw and heard them, and was instructed by them what she ought to do, or to leave undone.

In the year 1519, on the feast of the holy Apostles Simon and Jude, while this blessed virgin was praying particularly for her enemies, and those who wilfully persecuted her, that God would enlighten them and not permit them to fall into mortal sin, and offend His Divine Majesty, she was overcome by sleep, and when she awoke she found herself repeating the psalm, Domine Deus meus, in te speravi ; salvum me fac ex omnibus persequentibus me et libera me.—O Lord, my God, in Thee have I put my trust ; save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me. She was surprised at this, and as she considered it pensively, the Royal Prophet David appeared to her, chanting to his lyre so sweetly, that it seemed as if the soul of the Blessed Catherine must separate itself from the body by reason of the harmony of this instru-

ment. After that the Prophet David had sung thus, he spoke to her in the following manner: "Remember, my daughter, that all men who are in this mortal life for the most part are sinners, and it is necessary to do penance in this life, not in that which we look forward to. Therefore you must endure with courage all the troubles which shall come upon you in future; and know that all you have asked of God has been liberally granted you." Thus this blessed virgin had the testimony of the Royal Prophet of the Old Testament.

Once when she was very little, and was going by her mother's commands to some place, she was tormented by a great pain in her head, caused by vertigo, and she feared lest she should fall down in the road, but St. John Baptist appeared to her, and delivered her from her sufferings with the sign of the cross, saying, "Have courage, my daughter, and follow boldly the movements of the Holy Spirit, and serve God with good will, for by His grace thou shalt produce very great fruits in the Church militant." This testimony she had from one whom the infallible truth has pronounced to be more than a prophet, who was the term of the Old and the beginning of the New Testament, and of the Law of grace. This blessed girl was once poisoned, and no human remedy could be found to save her, when St. John the Evangelist appeared to her, holding a silver cup three fingers high in his hand, half full of some liquid, which he gave her to drink, and she was in that instant miraculously cured,

when her life was despaired of. She was very familiar with several of the saints of Paradise, and spoke with such openness and simplicity of their actions, their martyrdoms, and their glorious qualities, that it seemed as if she had been brought up with them, and had seen with her own eyes what their heroic deeds had done for posterity.

She drew most beautiful pictures with her wise words, of the appearance of the Mother of Jesus Christ, and said in what she did not resemble her dear Son. She said that the blessed St. Mary Magdalen was very beautiful, while, on the contrary, St. Martin was naturally ugly, although his soul was beautiful because of the grace which resided there. She said that the martyr, St. Agatha, was beautiful, having a full and very pleasing face, of a rather dark colour. She maintained that St. Agnes was beautiful, but very little, her face was plump, and her complexion reddish, and that she had curling hair; St. Margaret was of the middle stature, her eyes were large and black. St. Catherine's beauty was perfect, and no fault could be found in it. St. Cecilia was tall and very slender. She described St. Augustine as being considerably tall, of a dark complexion, and very circumspect in his actions; St. Francis was dark, little, and blear-eyed; St. Anthony was small in stature, with a beautiful expression of the eye; St. Bernard was joyous, and rather little. She used to give similar descriptions of many other saints, but we have omitted them for fear of wearying the

reader. I will only add that she saw one of her spiritual fathers, Brother Jerome of Verona, whose body now lies in our church at Modena.

She very often communicated by the ministry of angels, of many of the saints, and the archangel Michael. She had a cross marked visibly on her breast, which was seen for a long time engraved on the flesh. She, moreover, frequently received the holy Sacrament of the Altar from the hands of Jesus Christ Himself. She received many other favours and small gifts from our Saviour, and from several saints, such as gowns, rosaries, and also money, when she was in need, and could not provide for her minor wants, by knitting, sewing, or spinning, which were the labours of her hands, by which she gained her livelihood.

She was once taken to Jerusalem, and after she had seen and devoutly adored all the mysteries of the Passion of Jesus Christ, her dear Spouse gave her a rich present, namely, two pieces of the wood of the holy cross, one of which she herself gave to the count, John Francis of Mirandole, and the other to one of his daughters, who was the wife of the Duke of Genoa, and Count of Renda. The count testifies to having seen many miracles worked by these relics, when he put them on persons possessed by the devil, who were brought to him.

On one occasion Jesus Christ was visibly present in the blessed Catherine's chamber, and discoursing on spiritual matters, when Catherine was called by a particular friend of hers to come to

do some work of charity. She answered that she could not go then, being otherwise engaged, but her heavenly Spouse commanded her to go where she was asked, and to leave Him alone. She again excused herself by saying, that it was not becoming to leave the Creator for the creature, to which our Lord answered, "Although it seems hard to thee, my dear Spouse, to go away and leave Me, it is very pleasing to Me that thou shouldst deprive thyself of thine own consolations for love of Me, and for the good of thy neighbour. Only go with good will, and fear nothing. Thou wilt not leave Me by that, nor shall I forsake thee, but shall ever be with thee." After these words the virgin received the blessing of her dear Spouse, and learnt for the future to obey simply and quickly, especially in cases of charity.

When she was nine years old, this blessed child was compelled, by the great poverty of her family, to work without taking a moment of rest; and one day in particular, when she remembered the hunger and want of her poor mother, she was overcome by sadness, and leaning her head on the loom, she wept with many tears, and recommended the poverty and misery of the house to God, who is the Lord and absolute Master of all things. Behold, at that very moment, a young child, apparently nine years old, appeared to her, with no clothes but a simple cotton shirt, and asked for an alms. She answered that she was ready to give him her own blood, and even her life for the love of God, but that she had not then one thing on earth which

she could give him to help his poverty. She would, nevertheless go to seek and look carefully in the house to see if there was not a little bread or something to eat. Then Jesus Christ, who was concealed in the form of this little child, disclosed Himself to her, and consoled her, and giving her a piece of silver money to provide for her necessities, encouraged her to bear with fortitude, after His example, the blows which fortune, usually the enemy of virtuous people, might send her.

Another time, in her early childhood, she broke a certain glass cup, for which her mother whipped her, and threatened to punish her still more severely if she should ever break another. It happened that she shortly afterwards broke another by accident, and remembering her mother's threats, she began to cry in expectation of the blows, so piteously that it would have moved the very animals to compassion, but just at that moment a most beautiful child suddenly appeared in the room, who picked up, as he best could, all the pieces of the broken cup, and gave it back made whole by an evident miracle, to the virgin, who greatly rejoiced thereat, and the child vanished from her eyes.

Another time, on the first day of Lent, when the blessed Catherine was greatly afflicted by a disturbance between her father George and her mother Biblia, occasioned by her desire of taking her meal alone, as she fasted that day on bread and water, her mother had gone away to one of her relations, out of vexation. Catherine began

to cry so violently, that she was all bathed in tears. Then Jesus Christ appeared to her in the form of a boy of fourteen, who comforted her, and foretold that her mother, who was then in some affliction, would enjoy a very happy old age, and be finally saved, and dying in the grace of God, would go to paradise. After this He took her bread, and breaking it into small pieces with His most sacred hands, He blessed it, and graciously invited her to eat. This action made such an impression on her, that she broke her bread without a knife, in memory of it, as long as she lived.

Once when Jesus Christ appeared to her, He taught her to contemplate the joyful mysteries on Sundays and feast days; at other times He cured her, as on the day of our Lady's Nativity, when she had been wounded in one hand, He immediately healed it with the holy sign of the cross. What we are now about to relate is wonderful, and is a privilege granted to few, namely, that she was taught to read by Jesus Christ Himself, whereas before she did not know a single letter, and what is still more surprising is, that she could only read the office of her order.

This blessed spouse of Jesus Christ had the privilege of being frequently carried invisibly to most distant places, to deliver her friends when they found themselves in pressing dangers; so that the common people usually called her the "Masque" of God. In Piedmont, and through the mountains of Savoy, old women are called "masques and sorceresses," and what they infor-

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red from this name, was that as the wicked sorceresses are carried through the air by the devils, so the blessed Catherine was sometimes borne by the good angels wherever it pleased God that she should go for His glory, and therefore they called her "masque" of God, while the others are "masques" of satan.

When the holy virgin was ten, or at most eleven years old, she was carried to a very holy priest to whom God had revealed this young girl's sanctity. There was in a place named Alba Pompea a man who had resolved in his own mind to commit a great crime; and as his father confessor could not dissuade him from it, he had recourse to the help of the spouse of Christ, who was moved by her charity, and caused herself to be miraculously and invisibly carried to the place in which the young man, who was bent upon his own ruin, was. By the grace of God, and by her holy exhortations, she made him change his determination, and forsake evil, and follow goodness. She also appeared once to another young man who was asleep, and taking hold of his hair she awoke him, and reproved him for some of his sins, which were most scandalous. He begged her pardon, and from that time forward he renounced his evil manner of living.

She once went invisibly in body and soul to the distance of about fifty miles, to reprove a powerful nobleman, who was the principal cause of the continuation of the war in Italy; she found him walking about in a large hall, and com-

manded him in the name of Jesus Christ to lay aside his vices, and especially his bad will, which made him thus keep alive the fire of dissension, and foment it still more by his wicked counsels, thus prolonging the war in Christendom. She admonished him to leave off this violent thirst for earthly and transitory good, otherwise the wrath of the all powerful God would fall upon him when he least expected it.

This great lord was at first troubled by the words of the blessed virgin; however, when he learnt who she was, and her condition, and the reason of her coming, he gave her hopes of his making peace, and doing all she had proposed to him for the glory of God and for the salvation of his neighbour. The Blessed Catherine told Count John Francis Picus with her own mouth, how she had made this journey, which was about the space of one hundred miles, going and returning in four hours.

There was a celebrated preacher, who was opposed to this happy virgin, and believed her to be deceived and deluded by the enemy of nature, and one night she appeared to him while he slept, with another companion of her own order, wearing the same habit, and spoke to him in the following manner, reproving him for his incredulity: "My father, give up the bad will that you bear me, and your endeavours to persuade others against me, for although my life and my actions do not deserve your good opinion, you ought nevertheless to respect God who can do with one of His handmaids whatever pleases His

Divine Majesty." This preacher had never seen the Blessed Catherine, but he described her with his words as if he had spoken to her and had seen her frequently. This circumstance altered his opinion, and he went to see her, and became one of her most confidential friends, when he came to know her sanctity.

She penetrated into the most secret thoughts of the human heart by Divine revelation, and told their thoughts to several persons, giving them an opportunity of correcting themselves by her humble and charitable admonitions. She foretold in the spirit of prophecy many things which came to pass as she predicted; for instance, the death of Pope Julius II., the coming of the French into Italy, and the imprisonment of the most Christian king of France at Pizzighettone near Pavia.

When she was yet a girl of ten or twelve years old, the Queen of Angels told her in an apparition, how she was to take the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic. This was fulfilled when a convent of Friars Preachers was built in the city of Raconigi, after much opposition from many persons, all which had been foretold long before the building of the convent; and she knew moreover the name of the father at whose hands she was to receive the grace of being clothed with this holy habit.

She once in an ecstasy saw Jesus Christ call three angels, to whom He distributed three lances. The first was clad in white and was to direct his lance against carnal sinners; the second wore

a red robe, and to him was given the office of doing vengeance on the avaricious and parsimonious; the third was clothed in divers colours, and was commanded to punish the proud. Another time when she was in ecstasy, she was led into a church of which all the walls were hung with black, and she wondered very much at seeing herself dressed in the same colour. And behold, before she had recovered from her astonishment, she saw the Mother of God advancing, who came to her, and sitting down, spoke to her as follows: "Do not be the least surprised, my dear daughter, at seeing the church thus attired in mourning, for the sins of the world, and principally of those who should have been her pastors and husbands, have thus darkened and tarnished it. Thou art very properly dressed in black for the great grief and sadness which thou shouldest have in thy soul at seeing the precious blood, and the pains and labours of my dear Son, thy heavenly Spouse, so little valued. Nay, thou seest them so badly received, and quite trampled under foot, because men will not remember such a signal benefit; but it will sadden thee far more to see the scourges and tribulations that God will send down and fulminate on His Church, so disfigured and vilified."

When the Blessed Virgin had finished speaking, two persons presented themselves, and ranged themselves in order for a single combat; one, whose countenance was fearful and terrible, was dressed in black; and the other, who was more graceful and beautiful, was clothed in white and

red, and carried a sword in his hand with an image of Jesus Christ engraved on the hilt; and he came out victorious from the combat.

In the same year she saw in spirit two great camps, the standard of one was white and red, and a beautiful virgin with her Child Jesus in her arms was painted in the centre, and there was beneath it a cross with another picture. The other standard was black, and there was in it an effigy of a most horrible face. A young man who did not seem yet thirty years old advanced against this camp, and began to fight with such success that he won a glorious victory, though with great loss of his soldiers. It seemed that all who remained alive in the camp of his enemies ran to some place to receive holy baptism.

In the year 1525, on the 4th of March, she saw a great army in the air, and understood that they were all Turks. At the end of April, two months after this vision, she was led in spirit to a vast plain, and she saw on the right hand an encampment which seemed very strongly defended and filled with good soldiers; and in the midst there was planted a rich banner, surmounted by an image of God holding a figure of the world in his hand, and on the world there was a precious stone about the size of a nut. At the right hand of the standard, which had the name of Jesus engraved and written on it, there was an altar prepared. When she turned to the left she saw another great camp, the captain of which was very handsome, dressed in golden robes, and of most gracious appearance.

On a sudden the two armies engaged in battle, and many soldiers were killed on both sides, whose bodies lay on the ground. At last the captain of the camp which was on the left hand was led with many of his men to the aforesaid altar, and there stood by it one wearing on his head a mitre with three crowns; and then followed a solemn baptism.

In the year 1521 an epidemic broke out in Turin, and the neighbouring parts of Piedmont, and the soul of the Blessed Catherine was much troubled at the misfortune which had fallen on her country. Therefore while she prayed God that He would be pleased to pardon His people and to revenge their sins on herself, two angels appeared to her bearing a dead body on a bier. They said to her, "Thou knowest, O beloved Catherine, that God is so wrath at the great number of wicked men, that unless thou hadst resisted it by offering thy body to blows and torments, His anger would have been already poured forth upon all mankind; but since they show no signs of amendment, nor any desire to correct themselves and leave their evil ways, behold we bring the pestilence shown by this bier." "Alas!" replied the Blessed Catherine, "let not God punish us according to our sins and our deserts, but may He rather inflict His punisment and cast the bitternes of His just anger and His just vengeance upon me." Her prayers were so agreeable to the Divine Majesty, that God withdrew His anger from her country, and regarded it with the eyes of His mercy and

clemency, so that although the contagion ravaged the towns round Raconigi, Raconigi itself, by the merits of this blessed servant of God, was free from all infection. Her raptures were very frequent; and she often had very great revelations from God. She was once taken in spirit up to heaven, where she saw and enjoyed as much as it is lawful for a mortal woman to see, that is to say, the glory of God; another time she was conducted to hell to see with amazement the great torments of the damned; she was sometimes carried to Purgatory, where she conversed with the souls which were afflicted in these pains, whom she exhorted to patience, and consoled by her remonstrances. Once on the feast of the angels she was lifted up in spirit to heaven, where she beheld the glory of the blessed, but it was impossible for her ever to describe it in words. She contented herself with shadowing it vaguely by some comparison taken from the goods and the happiness which God gives to men here below; always veiling her words, and keeping them in the twilight of many similitudes. When she returned from her ecstasies to her mortal body, it seemed to her that a fine palace enriched with all wealth and every imaginable beauty, came to a vile and abject, straw-covered shed of shepherds. She said that the blessed above in Paradise are all united and joined together with the bond of holy love, and wonderful order. To give an example of the great union, and distinction at the same time, of the saints in the heavenly kingdom, she used to say that just as the red

berries within the pomegranate are arranged in wonderful order, closely joined together by nature which produces nothing in vain, so the saints are divinely joined in charity and love, and all united together with most beautiful order in this heavenly glory.

Another time, on the feast of St. Jerome, her soul penetrated the celestial spheres, and she saw great rejoicings, and heard most harmonious songs in paradise, where it was shown her that many souls were to be saved by her salutary admonitions, and holy and acceptable prayers. Once on the feast of the Blessed Sacrament, she was borne by the angels into the presence of God in paradise, where she saw near the throne of the Divine Majesty a great book, sealed with seven seals, and it was granted her by a particular privilege to read in it the names of her spiritual children. She prayed God most earnestly that they might never mortally offend His goodness, which she obtained for many of them, but not for all, because all were not equally fit. It was promised her that if they should fall into sin at the end of their days they should rise from it, and be saved. She next saw the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the other saints and blessed, one by one, in lovely order, giving eternal thanks to the most Holy Trinity, and after all the others, in company of her seraphim and her angel Guardian, she approached the awful throne of God with all humility and submission, and gave infinite thanks to His glory and majesty for the innumerable favours which He had condescended to shower

upon her, having preserved her from so many misfortunes, and enriched her with so many graces.

On the 25th of September, when the gospel of the marriage feast was read, the Blessed Catherine was raised in a rapture to heaven, and saw the Divine marriage-feast represented. She was clothed in a beautiful robe of purple, and crowned with a very rich crown, though her ornaments were not altogether complete. She heard most exquisite harmony and melody, with most sublime sounds, which gave her soul great delight. Some days after, on the feast of All Saints, she saw them in order, returning eternal thanks to God, for having willed that they should have been thus honoured on earth. She saw Jesus Christ in such an admirable manner, that it was impossible to describe it, Himself serving at this celestial banquet mentioned by the gospel, and asserted that she had never seen a greater triumph, though she had frequently been to paradise in her raptures. She also knew, and saw clearly there, those who by her means were one day to arrive at these heavenly nuptials, and enjoy for ever these infinite delights.

In the year of our salvation 1514, when on All Saints day this Virgin was contemplating the glory of paradise, she was conducted to heaven by the mediation of St. John the Evangelist, by the sublime path of intelligence. She continually advanced, preceded by her two angel Guardians, the seraphim carrying the white and red standard. Seeing by the way that some murmured, others

slandered, others laughed at and insulted her, and others seemed to wish to lay violent hands on her and to fight, she turned to the Apostle and asked him what was the meaning of the difficult and rugged nature of the road to paradise, when the uncreated truth, Jesus Christ, says that His yoke is easy and His burden light? The Apostle answered, "that it is in truth difficult to him who knows not and does not love, but to those who know God and love Him with their whole heart, which is the tribute that the creature owes to its Creator, it is very easy and much desired by them."

When he had said this, he presented a small basket full of roses and flowers to the virgin, which rejoiced her greatly; and they all reached at last a magnificent castle, lying towards the east, into which the virgin Catherine was led by the Apostle, and beheld things that she never could or would relate.

She was once tormented by extraordinary pains, which are like flowers that God gives to His elect in this world, whom He caresses, and she prayed God to comfort her in these insupportable sufferings; and thereupon, an angel dressed in gold presented himself to her, with a musical instrument in his hand. He put it to his mouth and sounded one note, which was so melodious, that if he had repeated it, the virgin's senses would not have been able to endure the sweetness. She went in a rapture to heaven another time in the month of September, and she saw the most Holy Trinity, which caused her such intense

happiness, that she implored her dear spouse, Jesus Christ, for a long time, not to suffer her to return any more to the prison and the stable of this miserable world. Nevertheless, hearing that her crown was not yet completed, she resigned herself entirely to the will of God. The Blessed Catherine was once taken by two angels to hell, to see and consider the great pains and afflictions of the wretched damned souls; and two fierce and foul demons came up to ask the reason of her coming, what she was going to do, or what she was seeking. She replied, that she had come on purpose to see the power and the justice of God exercised upon them.

"God," said she, "showed His omnipotence when He drove you from heaven, He now displays His justice by tormenting you in these burning flames." Then turning to God, she said, "O goodness! O sovereign mercy! O infinite charity! how hast Thou manifested Thyself to human nature. The angels fell, and so did man. Thou hast banished the angels of heaven for ever, and Thou hast exalted man to the heavenly kingdom above. Thou hast prepared seats in hell for the angels of darkness, while to man Thou hast opened the gates of heaven. Thou hast left the angel in his hardhearted obstinacy, and hast given man the means of doing penance. O immense God, how worthy art Thou of love and of glory! Let man therefore be ashamed, and thou my soul be confounded, for not giving thanks according to thy duty and thy power, to such majestic bounty. O my hope, O my sweet Jesus,

O my most amiable Jesus, my Saviour and Redeemer, when shall I really feel these things and love thee more? Miserable is he who does not serve Thee, wretched and unhappy is he who does not love Thee." When the virgin gave these holy praises to her dear Spouse, in the presence of the demons, and in the midst of hell, they were all amazed and cast down. The virgin went still further into hell, and saw the smoke and the fire, and heard most cruel blasphemies, weeping and gnashing of teeth, that issued from a very deep well into which she cast her eyes, and saw the most dreadful sufferings of the damned souls, among which she recognized one whom she knew, which she could never relate for the great horror she had experienced.

Once when a great prince died, the blessed Catherine knew well, although she was very far from the place where he died, that his soul had been given up into the hands of the devils, to be most grievously tormented. She was taken in a rapture in a moment of time to this unhappy dwelling, in order that she should see the Divine Justice. When she was there, it was granted her to speak to the soul of this great prince. She enquired whether he knew her, and he replied that he did, and that she was Catherine of Raconigi, who had before in past times reproved him, and through charity menaced that he would fall into eternal damnation, unless he would amend his evil and ill-regulated desires. Then the virgin said, "If thou hadst done what I told thee from God, and from the great charity which inspired

me to say these things, thou wouldst now be a member of Jesus Christ, and not as thou now findest thyself, of Satan, nor wouldst thou be condemned to eternal misery, but transported to enjoy on high the happiness of the children of God." That wretched soul answered, that its inordinate love of self, its great greediness of worldly glory, and the neglect of the charitable correction which she made it while it yet lived in the world, had led it miserably into this place of torment, and enrolled it in the book of the condemned, never to see God's Face, nor to enjoy His favour.

This beloved spouse of Jesus Christ, moved by the great charity that had wounded her soul, and who was ever burning in the fire of love, once prayed Him to shut the mouth of hell, and she received in answer that that could not be, because the Divine Justice ought to have its sway, and to show its effects. To this she answered, that she thought the glory of God and His immense bounty, would shine much more if it was praised by a greater number of souls who had not been condemned to these pains; but she was immediately answered, that the glory of the Divine Justice was no less than the glory of His mercy. Then the blessed Virgin said, "Alas, my God, exercise Thy justice upon me if it please Thee; I desire to feel its shafts." Jesus Christ said, "Thou couldst not endure so many torments, nor is it reasonable that thou shouldst do penance for the sins of others." "Why then," said the Virgin, "O my sweet heavenly spouse, hast thou

caused such a great desire of suffering to bud in my heart, if Thou wilt not satisfy my desire of enduring, O sweet heart of my soul." Then Jesus Christ said, "This thy pious desire will be very useful to thee, and by thy means to many others, but not to all; neither does My passion produce the same effects on each and every one, but only on those who prepare themselves with my preventing grace to receive the fruits of it."

She was once in a rapture taken to hell, where she saw three frightful and horrible mouths into which some prelates of the Church and princes of the world who were yet living were entering. She was troubled when she saw this, and full of fear, but the company of the angel who was with her comforted and consoled her very much. After the angel had shown hell to her, he gave her a paper shut up with three seals; when she opened it she found it contained a gold shield, with the face of Jesus Christ wearing the crown upon it, but there was nothing written upon it either within or without. The angel then told her that these three seals signified the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity, by the means of which heaven is opened, and we see Jesus Christ above in His glory, and the white paper signified innocence, candour, and purity, without which we cannot enjoy the vision of God.

One day, when the blessed Catherine was labouring under a violent fever, she set herself to consider the unendurable pains of Purgatory, and said to herself, "What wouldst thou do if thou wert now in Purgatory, suffering those exces-

sive pains?" and that instant she heard a voice, saying, "Thou dost well and holily to ponder on these pains, but in order that thou mayest more fully know their intensity and their severity, thou shalt experience a little of the fire." Immediately afterwards a single spark of fire touched her left cheek, which gave such pain that she stated that in her whole life she had never felt a worse torture.

In the year of our salvation, 1516, on the feast of St. Matthias, all the women who were round her bed saw the spark of fire, and the Blessed Catherine, after having made this trial, despised all the pains and toils which she might endure in this world, in comparison with that which she had suffered for short a time. She once gave all her merits to a soul which had passed from this world to the other, and after five days the aforesaid soul appeared to her freed from its sufferings, and thanked her most humbly, assuring her that the punishments of Purgatory are greater than people think or wish to be believed. She was once in Purgatory during an ecstasy, and a soul earnestly entreated her to give her some help and assistance, and to recommend her to a certain Prior of our friars, whose mother she had been. When Catherine had returned to her former state she communicated to this good Prior the condition of his mother through her confessor, and she herself, touched by charity, would suffer part of the pains which were due to this soul. By these means the soul was delivered from Purgatory in a few days, and appeared to her accompanied by some of the

angels, and blessed saints, to thank her for her charity to her, and as she directed her flight towards heaven, she recommended her son to her. The virgin answered that no one could give him more help and assistance than she who was his own mother, and saw God face to face. "What thou hast said, O blessed one, is true," the soul answered, "nevertheless not being any longer able to gain merit or to suffer, I cannot give him such powerful and efficacious aid as thou canst."

The following year, on the feast of the three kings, this virgin was praying for the soul of the mother of a Prior whom she had known familiarly, and going into an ecstasy, was taken to the place of these torments, where she met this soul, and the soul entreated her to make known her situation and condition to her son. When her soul had returned to the body she fulfilled her promise and described her face, and the condition she was in to her son. Not content with having delivered the message, she would further undergo herself the pains which were due to this soul in order that she might be freed as soon as possible from her miseries. For fifteen days, therefore, Catherine endured excessive pain, and was obliged to remain in bed, which increased and augmented her torment; and she saw the soul all joyful and smiling, who, as she went to Paradise chanting the glory of God, thanked her and again recommended her son to her. Thus Blessed Catherine delivered several souls from Purgatory by her prayers, but we shall not recount them for fear of being prolix. Now, to enter upon a new track we will relate that when

Catherine was only five years old, she was so overcome by the fire of Divine love that she was often taken up to heaven to see her Beloved, and would afterwards descend to these darksome prisons to console the afflicted souls that were there ; and if she knew anything that conduced to the glory of God she would suffer and work continually until she saw it completed, and on the other hand if she knew of anything that would obscure His glory and was contrary to the law of God, she was in trouble until this impediment was removed, fearing lest some scandal should arise from it. Moreover, Satan opposed her in all her good works, and she used to combat him with courage, despise his menaces, and endure his fury and his blows, when such was the will of her beloved Spouse. She endeavoured to make every one love Him who was dearly beloved by her ; for divine love does not preclude rivals and competitors.

This virgin was always very generous, for although she was poor, the daughter of a poor locksmith, born in the world at a time when her country had been sacked and pillaged, when it was only with great labour that she could by the art of weaving provide for her own necessities, she used, nevertheless, to give to the poor all the bread and clothes that she might have. And when she could not give her clothes entirely to the poor because she had no others than those she wore, she unsewed her sleeves and gave them away without any one perceiving it. If she had none of these temporal things and could not give anything to the poor, she did not fail to assist

them with spiritual riches, which are so much the more precious, as the soul is more precious than the body, undertaking fasts, prayers, and disciplines, and other painful works for their benefit.

When she was but nine years old, as she returned from the oven one Saturday with a little bread which they had sent to be baked for dinner, not being able to endure their fast any longer, St. Catherine of Sienna presented herself to the virgin in the form of a young girl aged twelve years, dressed in white, but poor, who humbly asked her for an alms. The Blessed Catherine, fearing that her mother would be angry and scold her if she gave away the bread which was more than necessary for them, told the poor girl that she should wait a little until all the bread in the oven was baked, and that then her mother would give her some, and she continued her walk.

But she was no sooner arrived at home than she began to feel remorse of conscience, and she said to herself, "O what scanty charity, O what small compassion reigns within thee! wouldst thou, miserable as thou art, like thy humble petition to be so rudely answered? Alas! how can I tell whether this poor girl who asked me for an alms, was not in greater want of it than myself?" She immediately left the house and begged God to grant her the favour of seeing again the poor girl who had asked her for an alms. When she found her she said to her, "Pardon me, my sister, if I have been rude and cruel to you. Here is the bread which you asked me for; another time I will be more civil and charitable." The young girl took

the bread with a smile, and when she had tasted a little of it she gave her back the rest, and telling her to be of good heart, for her alms had been very agreeable before the throne of the divine Majesty, she vanished from her sight, and left her full of consolation and spiritual joy. The Blessed Catherine of Raconigi did not then know that it was St. Catherine of Sienna, but after some years when she had become very familiar with her, St. Catherine revealed to her how the circumstance had happened.

When this holy virgin was thirteen years old she gave her under garment to Jesus Christ who appeared to her in the form of a poor man half clad, at the door of her house, and He clothed her in exchange with a rich and beautiful robe. Another time, when she was a little older, she met a poor woman almost naked in the middle of winter, and moved by compassion she unsewed on the spot the sleeves of her own gown, and gave them to this poor woman. When her heart was grieved at thus seeing her neighbour in extreme poverty, she used to address words like these to her Spouse Jesus Christ, "Alas, my God, I was born very poor in this world, and for love of Thee I desire to live and die in poverty. I had rather be without clothes than without charity." After this alms Jesus Christ appeared to her, at which she rejoiced infinitely; and He encouraged her to pursue the path she had trodden until then, for He would be ever with her. She once saw a little child who was very poor, suffering dreadfully from cold; so, touched by her

charity, she took him into her room, where she warmed him, combed his hair, and dressed him in some of her own apparel. When she had done this, Jesus Christ appeared to her and gave her a wreath of red and white roses, with these words: "Because thou hast done this act of charity to this poor child, I now give thee these roses, and in the next world I will give thee a much greater reward." The servants, and those who frequented her house attested that although it was in time of winter they perceived that day a most delicious smell of roses.

In the year of our salvation, 1520, being in a rapture, she saw St. Peter and St. Paul, and the former laid on her shoulders the keys of infinite mercy, and the latter the sword of divine justice, exhorting her to pray fervently for the necessities of the Church. Another time she beheld Jesus Christ wearing on His head a crown of gold, ornamented with twelve stars, and in the centre of each there was a large ruby and a precious pearl. St. Peter Martyr accompanied our Lord, carrying a cross enriched with precious stones, at the end of which appeared a crown of thorns with two nails, which St. Peter Martyr took and thrust into the heart of the Blessed Catherine, and it gave her such excessive pain that she fell on the ground as if she were dead. She suffered this pain to redeem many souls from the wrath of God.

As she prayed one day for the Church, that God would give it good pastors, our Saviour appeared to her clothed in a black robe, holding a

bloody dagger in His hand, showing great wrath against ungrateful sinners. Seeing this, she threw herself on the ground asking for mercy and pardon, especially for those who minister in sacred things, for she knew that the Lord's anger was principally against them ; and in order that the divine justice should have part of its sway she received in her heart a wound from a knife, which gave her incredible pain for many years. The love and charity which she had for Jesus Christ and for her neighbour, were so great that she willingly endured much labour, not only for the Church but even for some private persons, which might truly be enumerated. She was besides very humble, and this virtue shone with infinite brightness, in her words and all her works. She frequently said that had any other person received from God the gifts and graces which she ingenuously confessed she had received, they would have reaped more fruit, and would have had more perception of heavenly things than her ingratitude and forgetfulness had allowed her to have. When she heard any one praised for holiness of life, she wept over her own tepidity and negligence, and her want of fervour in serving God. She extremely abhorred human praises, and more than once was seen to burn certain writings which described her visions when they were put into her hands, and although after her spiritual fathers had reproved her for so doing she let the writings alone, it was not that any praise might be given to her for them, but she

attributed everything to God, who is the source and the cause of all our good.

When she was a very young girl, she took much delight in solitary places, and avoided the churches where she thought there might be a great concourse of people. This desire of holy solitude so grew in her that in the year of our Lord 1512, and the twenty-seventh of her age, at six o'clock in the night of the 19th of November, when the face of the earth was covered with darkness and snow, as secretly as she could, for fear lest her mother should see her, she took a crucifix in her hand, and kneeling down invoked the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be her guide in passing the Alps in safety, and going to some vast solitude, or else shutting herself up in some monastery where she might consecrate herself to God, and enjoy the fulness of His holy embraces. Upon this she heard a voice which distinctly said these words to her. "And whither wouldst thou go? I do not wish thee to go." She looked all round, and as she could not see any one, she concluded that she had offended the divine Majesty, and with this opinion she laid aside her design, and remained in melancholy until the feast of St. John the Evangelist, when Jesus Christ appeared to her and told her that He had not distributed so many graces to her, nor had heaven poured so many favours on her head, to the end that she might shut herself up in a hermitage, or a monastery of consecrated virgins, but that, living in her father's house, her good

example might be the cause of the salvation of many.

The next year Jesus Christ taught her to raise a spiritual edifice, laying a foundation of humility, and building the walls with afflictions and labours.

Although this virgin was gifted with such elevation of spirit, by the privilege of such frequent raptures, she was notwitstanding very affable and very gentle in all her manners; and while she worked with her hands her mind made pilgrimages to heaven. And if by reason of her poverty she was compelled to practise weaving, she used with her clear and exalted understanding to read in the library of nature, and by the help of visible things she raised herself in an admirable manner to those which are heavenly and invisible. It was her laudable custom before going to sleep to remember how she had spent the day, and such was her humility, that she concluded that she had never done any good, and had been until then a tree without fruit. She no sooner awoke in the morning than she got up, and without taking into account the private prayers which she proposed in the cabinet of her soul to make, she decided everything she intended to do in the course of that day, directing all her actions to the glory of God. Sometimes when she was asking pardon for her sins, she saw a ball of fire descend upon her head, and she thought she saw a hand issue from it which blessed her, and by this she knew that her humble prayers had

been granted. She was well accustomed to meditate on the death of the body, but she feared far more the death which comes of sin, and therefore she used to entreat the Divine Majesty to send her any torment or affliction, rather than allow her to fall into the abyss of sin which would cause her to lose His holy grace. Her rare and prudent counsels were shown by their effects, seeing that many great and learned personages had recourse to her in their perplexities. Claude, the Bishop of Marseilles, on his return from Rome visited the Blessed Catherine with Claude the Lord of Racouigi, although she was then ill in bed; and he went away much edified after having conversed with her for two hours, asserting that he had never met with a man who enjoyed a brighter and clearer intellect, or who was more rich in spiritual light than this virgin, for whom he had a great esteem. This prelate was then Doctor of Laws, and became afterwards Archbishop of Turin. Catherine had not passed the years of her youth before she began to macerate her small and innocent body with incredible austerities and penances. She did not dine with her family more than three times a week, and sometimes only twice. During some years she fasted on bread and water every day except Sunday, from the commencement of November until the Nativity of Jesus Christ. She did the same every day in Lent, and this in a cold and bracing climate, where it is the custom to eat twice or three times in the day; whereas we read that the austerities of the ancient Fathers were endured

in a hot and temperate climate, as Egypt, or in some part of Syria, or of Greece. If she ever partook of wine she mixed such a quantity of water with it, that it entirely lost its flavour, and only retained a little colour. When she heard that the foundations of a convent of Friars Preachers had been laid in Raconigi, she began to loathe meat in order to conform herself to them, who, by their holy constitutions, are forbidden to eat it, unless it is recommended by the physicians in cases of illness. She was accustomed to wear a large girdle of horse-hair round her waist, until she changed it for a belt of iron, which in time broke the skin, and entered deep into the flesh. She desired to have some sickness, that her soul might be more sober and recollected.

As it has been decided by the greatest theologians that every virtuous act made by reason of a vow, is more meritorious and deserving of a greater reward, the Blessed Catherine, after having trained herself for some time in all her austerities, resolved within herself to offer her virginity to God by vow; and having heard the praises of the blessed St. Catherine of Sienna from the mouth of a great preacher, on the day of her feast, as soon as she returned to her own house, she hid herself from her mother, for fear she might prevent her, and going into her little room with the door closed, she consecrated her virginity to Jesus Christ with these words:

"O Eternal Father, I offer my whole self to Thee, to Thy beloved Son Jesus, the Spouse of my soul,

to the Holy Spirit, and thee, O benignant Queen of Angels and of virgins, and I make a firm vow of preserving perpetual virginity, which I dedicate and desire to consecrate to you, O Father, O Son, O blessed Holy Ghost, and to thee immaculate and holy Virgin, trusting in your aid and assistance, for I know that I am very weak, and a most frail creature, unable to keep such a precious treasure without you. I make this vow, and I call all the angels and all the holy spirits of Paradise to witness it, especially my directors and masters St. Jerome, and St. Peter Martyr, and St. Catherine of Sienna, my dear mother." The following night St. Catherine of Sienna appeared to her surrounded by a light which eclipsed in brilliancy all lights that she had before seen, and spoke these words to her: "My dear daughter, thy vow has been very pleasing to thy Spouse, to the Blessed Virgin, and to me; only take courage and be of good will; I promise thee every help and support in the spiritual war, which will henceforward come upon thee, and will not fail to assist thee in thy need. Take now these two roses, one white and the other red, which thy dear Spouse sends thee, which will serve as a sign to wear on thy heart. The red rose will remind thee of the burning charity which Jesus Christ showed to thee and all the human race, in shedding His precious blood so profusely to wash and purify thee therewith; and the white rose will incite thee to think of His great purity and innocence, which thou wilt strive above all things to imitate;" and having said this and

given her her holy benediction, St. Catherine disappeared.

This blessed virgin had several wars and combats with the devils, and was assaulted by many of them, sometimes by two, or five, or even a greater number together. They appeared to her in human forms, sometimes like living men, and sometimes like dead corpses to frighten her still more, and they would occasionally take the form of holy persons, hoping to deceive the blessed Catherine by the veil of sanctity, or else they took the figure of beasts, birds, serpents, and other horrible and frightful monsters. She drove away her enemies by words, or by spitting upon them, or with a stick; frequently by the sign of the holy cross, and sometimes with her wise and prudent answers. Once when she was praying to God for the holy Church, a foul and shapeless demon appeared with a banner in his hand, on which there was represented a crown, and over it the words, *Rex superbiæ*—king of pride. After a long struggle she overcame and confounded him, and he said many injurious things to her, but the prudent virgin answered; "Since with the aid of my sweet Saviour I have this time confounded thy pride, and all thy cunning, it is a small thing to me that thou shouldst despise me, and say these abusive words to me, nor indeed should I approve of a cursed spirit who is eternally damned speaking well of me, and relating my praises." Satan had no words in his mouth to answer this, but filled with wrath he vanished like a shadow.

This king of pride appeared to her another time,

and disputed with her on the most Holy Trinity. The blessed Catherine said that she not only believed this ineffable mystery, but she had also known it clearly, and that there were three Persons in one and the same essence. Satan importuned her to explain this to him, but she gave him this answer. "Thou, O wicked one, hast more time, and art older than I am; it is thy business to explain it to me, it would not be becoming that a young girl like me should teach science to an ancient spirit full of knowledge and science." Satan continued to press her to grant his request, with an evil intention however, but the prudent virgin said, "I should be worse than a beast, if I were in this circumstance to satisfy thee, who art a beast, and speakest without reason or judgment." The proud spirit answered, "I am an intelligent creature, and am not deprived of reason, therefore thou art wrong in calling me a beast." Catherine replied, "Inasmuch as thou art not deficient in reason, thou hast always employed it to pursue and follow after evil, and hast also gone away from the first truth, and dost continually seek to withdraw from its way all those who are in it, which is nevertheless contrary to reason, which always persuades and gently invites us to draw near to good." Thereupon Satan, cursing the virgin, and Him who had created her, and taught her these things, retired in shame and confusion to the dungeons of hell.

Within the octave of the Holy Innocents, in the year 1524, the enemy of our race again ap-

peared to the blessed Catherine, and endeavoured to persuade her with soft and honied words, to give up such an austere manner of life, and enjoy the pleasures of this world, because, said this liar falsely, the soul being mortal she could not have any happiness nor any reward for her works and penances after death ; seeing that of so many thousands of persons who were just and holy, not one ever returned to comfort his friends and to tell them what happens to them in the next world after death, which they would certainly have done if their souls were immortal and adorned with charity. To this the virgin made the following reply. "Accursed beast, how dost thou expect to persuade me of the mortality of the soul, who have so many times seen the holy souls of paradise, and those which are in purgatory, and those too who are in the depths of hell, in thy everlasting prison ? The souls of the departed return to us from the other world, sometimes, but not always, according as God wills, to confirm and strengthen our belief in the resurrection, and to give us joy by their presence ; and thou, wretched monster as thou art, hast seen them." Satan said, "Do not judge by the corporal vision, thy eyes may easily be deceived." "I confess, humbly," replied Catherine, "that my eyes may be deceived, as thou thyself, wicked spirit, hast often endeavoured, with thy companions who are also damned, by transfiguring yourselves into angels of light, to deceive and mislead me if thou couldst. But what do I say ? The eye of my intelligence being enlightened by Divine light,

cannot be deceived in any way by thee, wicked as thou art, and for this reason I give infinite thanks to the sovereign and Eternal Truth, which has granted me this particular grace of being able to discern the good from the evil spirits, to follow after good, and to leave entirely what is perverse."

Once when the blessed Catherine was ill in bed, not satisfied with so many defeats, and the loss of so many great battles, which gave occasion for her to win laurels in proportion to her courageous victories, Satan had the insolence to enter her room, with a great number of his companions, and advised her to end her sufferings by miserably putting an end to her life, and used this argument founded on flesh and blood. "God has revealed to thee that thou art sheltered by His grace, and canst not make shipwreck in thy eternal salvation. It is therefore better, in order to escape from so many labours as those in which thou now art, and which increase every day, to seek death thyself, and so to pass to a happier life, for the divine predestination which promised to save thee, cannot break its promise and prove false to thee." "But," said Catherine, "how dost thou know that I am now in the grace of my God?" Satan answered, "When the Holy Spirit revealed that to thee, I was not very far from thee, and although it was forbidden me to approach, still I heard all thy conversation." To this Catherine answered, "If God sometimes reveals to some one that he will be saved, and is of the number of those who are predestined to eternal life, and is in His grace, it is to be interpreted in the right sense, namely,

so long as one perseveres in good until the end. Therefore if I walk in the true path of God's commandments, I do not doubt that I shall save myself; but if I transgressed the bounds of reason and the commandments of God, as thou hast done, and as, O wicked spirit, thou now exhortest me to do, I should certainly be damned. Now it is contrary to the will of God to kill myself, therefore, wicked spirit, I will not obey nor follow thy counsel." When Satan perceived by this the firmness of her resolution, he vanished like a wind and retired from her presence.

This blessed Catherine was once praying for the soul of a very great sinner, and she offered her body to endure several afflictions, and Satan then appeared to her, and reproved her sharply for having so little regard for her own body, and told her that she deceived herself by thinking that similar macerations made for others, were pleasing. Catherine answered, that God never rejects or despises a contrite and humble heart.

The night before the feast of St. Sebastian the martyr, about eleven o'clock, twenty-five or thirty devils entered visibly into the Saint's room, armed with stout sticks, and two who were bolder than the others, approached her bed to frighten her, but she drove them away with blows of her fist. Then they all rushed upon her, and began to beat her very cruelly, God so permitting it. Then Catherine finding herself in a shower of blows, like another philosopher Anaxarchus, spoke freely in the midst of them to the devils, "Strike boldly and do what you are allowed to do to my body,

for as to the soul, which is the principal part of me, you cannot possibly hurt it, for it is united by grace to God, to Him from whom you miserably separated yourself by your haughty pride." These words incited them still more to redouble their blows, and endeavour to kill her, for they did not know the limits of the power which heaven had given them of attacking this virgin with such fury; but on a sudden, they were all driven away by a most brilliant light which showed itself, in the midst of which was that Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ, who dissipated all their wicked efforts. When they were gone, the blessed Catherine, who was half dead, thus addressed her true Spouse: "My Lord and my only hope, where wert Thou when Thy enemies ill-treated me so cruelly?" Jesus replied, "I was with thee, my dear spouse, and I watched thy combat, and gave thee strength whereby thou hast happily gained the victory."

Satan once came in the garb of sanctity to tempt this blessed Catherine, but she immediately recognised him by the particular light she had received from God, and he went away to his greater confusion. The blessed St. Antony immediately appeared to her, and taught her what answer she should make to the enemy of our race, when he should come to tempt her, and try to make her fall into the net of his designs. "Answer him, then, that the victory is thine, and closing thy hand, show him thy fist, and threaten to shut him up in it, because God is on thy side."

A little time before the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, when Catherine was praying, the

king of pride, and a great number of his soldiers presented themselves to her, and as soon as she perceived them, she raised her heart and her mind to heaven, and humbly asked God's help in such peril. And behold, St. Peter Martyr, and St. Catherine of Sienna, at once descended from heaven to help her, and favour her with their countenance, as they had been from her cradle her principal protectors and defenders. The glorious martyr, therefore, spoke to the king of pride, and commanded him not to hurt this blessed virgin in the smallest degree. Satan answered, "I will prove to thee, by several reasons, that thou dost presume too much in commanding me thus." St. Peter said, "I should abase myself too much by disputing with a beast." "'Am I a beast?" said Satan, "I am more noble than thou. The angelic nature is more noble than the human nature; I am an angel, and thou art a man; I am of heaven, and thou art of earth." "It is true," said the blessed martyr, "that thou wert noble formerly, but now thou art a base villain, for by thy sin and disobedience thou hast lost this glorious nobility. Thou art indeed an angel, but an angel of darkness. Thou wert all heavenly, but now thou art a citizen and inhabitant of hell, and man, although in the body he is of the earth, yet in the soul he is entirely heavenly and divine, by the grace which God has liberally poured upon him, and he is more noble than thou, wretched one, who hast so fatally lost such an immense good." The mar-

tyr closed his mouth by this answer, which he could not gainsay, and full of confusion he vanished from before them.

One night while Catherine was sleeping in her small bed, two foul and tainted demons who had been the day before driven from the bodies of two men by her prayers, dragged her out of the bed, and throwing her on the floor beat her so severely, that she would in a short time have been found dead, if she had not been helped by some angels who came to deliver her from this danger, and who lifted her up from the ground, and replaced her on her couch. Once while Catherine was earnestly praying for the soul of a sick person who had been a great sinner and was on the verge of death, Satan appeared to her and offered her a large purse filled with gold, on condition that she would leave off praying for this soul, thus hoping to conquer her by avarice, since all other means had failed. But Catherine, who was far removed from the sin of avarice, drove him away in an opprobrious manner by abusive words, and continuing the work she had begun, she gained this sinner for God. This blessed Catherine won by her courage many great victories over the spirits of hell, as the author of her life relates more at length in his eighth book, but we who only aim at brevity must omit them, and refer the reader to the above-mentioned book, only relating this one, which is very remarkable and worthy of notice.

One night when Catherine was praying, and lifted up in spirit, she saw a demon in the air, in

the likeness of a furious dragon, who carried away a miserable woman as his prey; and Catherine, moved to compassion for her, humbly prayed for her deliverance. At first, she found a little difficulty in obtaining this grace for another, nevertheless, by continuing to knock with the hammer of perseverance at the gates of the mercy of God, she obtained what she asked. The fierce dragon descended in proportion as the prayers of the virgin mounted on high to the throne of the Divine Majesty; and, by the command of God, in the semblance of a large calf, it fell with its prey into the chamber of Catherine. She fought with it; and, having easily obtained the mastery, Satan fled away, ashamed and defeated, to hell below, which is his inheritance. The woman remained there half dead, and Catherine succoured her, and exhorted her to change her life and habits; and then, that same night, her angel guardian re-conducted her to her own home. She changed her life in truth, and left her evil ways to attach herself to virtue, and persevered in it until her death, having openly been, until then, the concubine of a priest. These instances will be sufficient to show the noble palms and laurels which this blessed Catherine of Raconigi gained in her vigorous conflicts with the enemy of mankind.

Let us now pass to the testimonies which many illustrious persons, and worthy of credit, have given to this blessed virgin's sanctity. A venerable priest related the following fact to Count John Francis of Mirandola. This priest, being in prayer, was lifted up in spirit by a fervour at which he was

surprised, and his angel guardian called him to see a great wonder. He saw a young girl before him, about ten or eleven years old, shining with brightness, and surrounded by immense splendour. The priest enquired who this young girl was, and how she had come there. And the angel answered that she was Catherine of Raconigi, and that she had been brought to this place in order that he might pray particularly for her ; because, being a young girl, and of a frail condition, she required the prayers of others. And having said this, the angel disappeared.

Claude, the Lord of Raconigi, who much esteemed Catherine's great qualities and virtues, stated that, in the darkest hours of the night, he had often seen, from the windows of his palace, certain splendours and rays from heaven, over the cot or house which she inhabited ; and he learnt afterwards, that at that precise time the saints of paradise had visited her. A priest, who was at the altar saying mass, saw upon the altar a little child clothed in red, who, after walking up and down for a short time, took a particle of the consecrated host, saying, "I want this particle to give to Catherine of Raconigi," and immediately disappeared. This holy priest knew that it had been Jesus Christ, who, that same day, communicated the blessed Catherine with His own hands, and fed her with His own body. Other priests often found particles of the Holy Sacrament taken away by invisible hands without their perceiving it ; and they were carried to this virgin when she was prevented from

otherwise communicating, or going to church to hear mass, and receive communion there.

In the year 1514, the second ring with which Jesus Christ had espoused her, was seen by two priests, one of whom belonged to our Order, and the other to a different Order. When she was praying in her room, a great and resplendent ray, in the form of a beautiful star, was often seen above her head, and her countenance frequently changed, and became more beautiful in the presence of the saints who visited her. A monk of St. Benedict, named Brother Maur, once, during his prayers, seemed to see Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, and the blessed Catherine with her body pierced through, with all the torments which His members endured for our redemption. Although he was about fifty or sixty leagues from Raconigi, he resolved to go and visit this blessed Catherine, and contracted a great intimacy and friendship with her, which was not dissolved by death; for this good religious, dying after some years, appeared to the virgin, and told her how he had gone to a happier life; and he often visited and consoled her in her troubles and distresses. Her room was often filled with a most delicious fragrance, although it never contained any perfume; but this sweet smell was believed to proceed from the bodies which the blessed saints of paradise took in order to visit her. When this virgin was out of her chamber, those who spoke with her experienced a great fragrance. It was, in fact, the sweet odour of her sanctity; for, keeping God continually present in the ark of her soul, is it

astonishing that she emitted a sweet fragrance when her interior was so sweet? She was once seen going to the church of St. Vincent at Raconigi, in company with three other sisters of the same order, and when her father confessor asked her who these young religious were, because the blessed Catherine was the only person in the whole town who wore the habit of the Third Order, she replied, with a little hesitation, that they were St. Catherine of Sienna, the blessed Sister Hosanna of Mantua, and the blessed Sister Columba of Rieti. In one of her journeys she was visibly accompanied by the Queen of angels, and St. Jerome, St. Peter Martyr, and St. Thomas Aquinas. When she made her public and solemn profession in the Third Order of St. Dominic, many clear signs of her sanctity were observed. In the first place, before going to the church, she endured with fortitude divers assaults and threats of the enemy of mankind, and was recompensed and greatly consoled by several of the angels and saints of paradise. Secondly, she was much honoured even in this world, for the Lord of Raconigi, and the highest nobles of the land, wished to be present at this act. But what ought to be esteemed far more than these witnesses to her holiness was, that by a singular grace, Jesus Christ, His most glorious mother, and all the court of heaven, were present at her profession. A sweet scent, therefore, diffused itself on the way as she went. St. Peter Martyr blessed the habit in which she was clothed; the songs of the angels, who rejoiced wonderfully at her profession, were heard; and a very bright

cloud, as it were of fire, was seen above her head. Many other testimonies of this virgin's sanctity might be advanced, but it is now time to speak of the glorious miracles which the Divine bounty chose to show forth, and to work by her means, while she yet lived in this world, lest the passing of time should obscure their lustre, or bury them in the tomb of oblivion.

She cured, by her prayers, a woman named Veronica, who was at Vigevano, at least twenty leagues from Raconigi, who had suffered from a bloody flux for the space of ten years, and was abandoned by all the doctors who had seen her. Another woman, named Frances, who was noble and renowned, having been troubled for a long time by some pains in her side, trusting in the blessed Catherine's virtue, spoke thus to God: "My sweet Saviour, if those things which are said of Catherine are true, I beseech Thee, for the sake of her merits, to deliver me from this painful illness." And she was in that moment miraculously freed from all her sufferings. A priest of the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustin was delivered in the same way from a very violent fever, for which he could find no human remedy. She also cured a young child of a gentleman named Giambullar, who had been ill for two years, and was given up by the physicians because they could not discover the nature of his complaint.

She sent a handkerchief she had worn to a young man who was reduced to great weakness by a disease of the chest, when he experienced the power of Catherine's sanctity, and recovered the

health he so much desired. She also restored to health a woman who had been tormented for a long time by an incurable imposthume on her breast. She recommended herself to the blessed Catherine's prayers; and though she was at the point of death, she happily recovered. At a hamlet not far from Raconigi, there lived two women, who were so odious to their husbands, that they could not bear to see them, or hear them spoken of. Both these women, without knowing anything of one another, went to confide their affliction to Catherine, who gave them the sound advice of making a good and general confession of all their sins to a priest, with authority to absolve them; and when this was done, she offered her private prayers for them, and this hatred was immediately changed into mutual friendship, and heavenly graces were multiplied upon them and their husbands; for she obtained the cure of the husband of the one, whose disease was incurable by its nature, and the grace of having children for the other woman, who had heretofore been barren. And, beside this, one of them was allowed to smell the sweet fragrance which proceeded from the mouth and the person of this holy Catherine.

In the year 1531, Sister Margaret de Biandra, who had worn the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic, but was a widow, departed this life; and when her body was taken to be buried, after the praiseworthy customs of Christians, Catherine went to the funeral; and while she prayed God to give her some token of the condition of her sister in the habit, behold, at that very moment, the dead per-

son raised her right hand, and taking hold of that of Catherine, she pressed it very hard, and then withdrew it by degrees to its original position. Catherine knew by this sign that she had escaped the pains of hell, but that she was then in purgatory. She offered her own merits, and prayed particularly to God for her, and delivered her in five days. John Anthony of Montaperto, being at sea off Pisa, was in danger of being submerged, and drowned. But he recommended himself with faith to the blessed Catherine, whom he knew well, and he saw her miraculously come to his assistance, and by her merits was freed from this danger. The same John Anthony was once with the Genoese galleys, which were labouring so hard in the heavy sea, that all those on board doubted whether their lives would be spared; but he, remembering the favour he had received from the blessed Catherine off Pisa, invoked her assistance, together with the commander of the galleys; and, after they had made their prayer, they both saw her appear in the air above their heads to protect them, and, in her presence, the winds and tempests were hushed at once, and the sea became calm, at which they all rejoiced, and gave thanks to God and to the blessed Catherine of Raconigi. The said John Anthony went to visit the virgin, and to thank her two months after he had left the galleys, and he published these two miracles everywhere to the glory of God, and of her who had delivered them by her merits and prayers.

In the year 1516, two religious of our order left the town of Bergamo in the month of November to visit this Blessed Catherine, at an appointed

time. One of them was very familiar with her, and the other who came from a town named Agobbio, had lived a long time at Perugia, and had never seen her before. When they visited her in her room they were much astonished to hear her describe the minute details of the plan and situation of the Convent of Bergamo, and tell many things of the Blessed Columba of Perugia, although she had not seen her or the convent either. Their wonder was greatly increased by observing that on their return from her house to the convent, the clouds miraculously abstained from raining or snowing, as she had promised that they would, for as soon as they set foot within their monastery, the ground was immediately covered with snow. Once, when Catherine was going to Saluzzo with a very honourable company of friends, it began to rain, and night came on, so that they could not, humanly speaking, reach the town that evening, but she had recourse to prayer as she sat on horseback, and was helped by heaven, for although the sun was set, her seraphim appeared, and his splendour lighted up the air all round, until she and all her companions reached the town, from which they were three miles distant when they were overtaken by the night.

On the fifth of June, in the year 1519, the Blessed Catherinehaving been surprised by a violent fever accompanied with very great pain, left the church in order to return home, and as she crossed the principal square she met a venerable priest who desired to have the spiritual consola-

tion of speaking with her. The pain which she endured made her long to put off the conversation, especially as the rays of the sun were so powerful, and the air so heated that it was difficult to stand upright, but on the other hand this priest being a stranger, she could not bring herself thus to send him back to his own house, so her charity for her neighbour overcame her own convenience. But no sooner did she stop to speak to that venerable priest, and stand still in the sunshine, than the divine bounty provided a light cloud to shelter His beloved Spouse which stood in the air above their heads, and protected them as well as a tent would have done. As soon as their conversation was ended and Catherine went to her home the cloud disappeared, for it had only come there in order to defend her from the burning rays of the sun.

With the sign of the holy cross she often laid the flames of fire, and delivered her own town of Raconigi from them. She often drove from its boundaries both hail showers and storms, and worked many other great miracles during her lifetime, which I cover with the veil of silence for fear of prolixity. If any one desires to know them, let him read them at length in the Latin life which has been written with great elegance by John Francis Picus, lord of Mirandola and Count of Concordia, with the intention of transmitting to posterity the beautiful virtues and great qualities which Heaven abundantly infused into this Blessed Catherine. This nobleman was familiarly acquainted with her, and often in-

duced her to go to Mirandola, and was worthy to see and to hear many of her actions. He has described with great eloquence what we have written here in our rude language, and have related them as the Holy Spirit best suggested to us, for the glory of God, and to fulfil the obligation which we owe to our order for producing such a beautiful flower from its garden, which has given a sweet scent both in heaven and earth, by the bright examples it left to those who shall come after us.

This good man ceased from his work in the year 1532, the sixty-third of his own age, and the forty-seventh of the Blessed Catherine's life, by reason of his old age, and left to another the charge of writing the remainder of her glorious life; we therefore leave his footsteps which we have followed as closely as we were able, when we related how Almighty God condescended to give such a virgin to the world, who possessed the privilege of reading the secrets of human hearts, of foreseeing the future, and beholding and considering the rewards of the blessed, and who saw in a marvellous and unusual manner the pains of the damned, and examined the sufferings of Purgatory. And in every kind of suffering she was very like her Spouse Jesus Christ, as far as a simple creature can be conformed to its Creator, by the particular graces which were profusely bestowed on her. We must now relate her happy passage from this valley of tears to the heavenly mansions, and speak of her death which was so precious

in the sight of God, according to the account which the Reverend Father Peter Martyr, of Garescio, sent me by letter, who knew her very well during her lifetime, and was only a day's journey distant from her at the time of her death, so that he was accurately informed of all that passed during her last moments by the very persons who were present at her decease. He has written the legend of her life at great length in Latin.

This blessed Catherine was exceedingly distressed by the great troubles of her native country, and the frequent murders which were continually committed in these wars, which caused the damnation of many souls; and she earnestly besought God to point the bow and the arrows of His just indignation at her body, and to grant peace and tranquillity to this poor country thus ruined and wasted. She called so perseveringly, and so importuned God's mercy with her prayers, that soon after the siege of the town of Carignano had been begun, the Divine Majesty heard her prayers, and she received the following answer from God Himself, "I will grant my beloved Catherine the demand which thou hast so earnestly made, but know that it will cost thee dear," which signified that she would lose her life after a long and painful illness. Thereupon a truce was made, and those who had endured the shocks and the violence of wars, and the irruptions of insolent soldiers, obtained some rest, but there was no rest for the blessed spouse of Jesus, who was assailed anew with many persecutions, by those very persons who should have

defended and protected her from those who opposed her. God permitted this to purify her the more, like gold in the crucible, in order that her perfection might be better demonstrated. At last she was assailed by a very grievous malady, and her own confessor having been taken from her, she was deprived of all human consolation, so that on the bed of death she had not one friend belonging to her order to assist her in this dreadful passage. This should not surprise any one, for by this she was more conformed to her true Spouse Jesus Christ, who, in this His bitter Passion, was forsaken and abandoned by almost all His friends. O my God, what patience and what constancy did this Blessed Catherine show by Thy love until her last breath. It seemed as if another and not herself were suffering, so joyful was the expression of her countenance, knowing what was said by St. James the Apostle, "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations." And although her best friends abandoned her, and all creatures, she never left her Creator, nor was she ever abandoned by Him; for although she desired to go out of the prison of this world, and to go and enjoy the presence, and the sweet embraces of her beloved Spouse Jesus Christ, nevertheless, like the Great St. Martin, she loved her neighbour so much, that she prayed to God, that if she was still necessary for the salvation of souls He would leave her in this valley of tears, and punish her for the sins of the whole world. In these last days she was so inflamed by Divine

love, that her heart seemed to open within her breast, and to contain the red hot coals of a burning furnace. Sometimes she seemed to be dead, by reason of a weakness which often assailed her when she wished to take breath, and which was so difficult that it appeared as if she must have given up the ghost.

At last one Sunday, the 4th of September, in the year 1547, at the hour of Tierce, after receiving all the sacraments of the Church with great sentiments of devotion, and having had the recommendation of the soul made by a venerable monk of the Order of St. Benedict, in the presence of many spiritual persons from a small town named Caramagna, in perfect possession of her intellect, she raised her eyes to heaven and gave back her blessed soul to her Creator, with so much peace and tranquillity, that it seemed as if she had fallen asleep. The great beauty which this holy body still possessed after its separation from the soul astonished and surprised every one, and clearly showed that the soul which had animated it had become an inhabitant of Paradise, and was written in the book of life. An exquisite fragrance issued from her sepulchre, and her glory was manifested and revealed to many persons worthy of credit. She appeared to a religious and gave him some good and profitable advice. A soldier who invoked her help was delivered from Satan in that very hour. Many other miracles were wrought by the merits and prayers of this spouse of Christ, which have been more fully described by the above-mentioned

Father Peter Martyr in the Life which he has written of this blessed servant of God.

And thou holy virgin, who like the Queen of Angels, hast lived about sixty-three years in this miserable world, and hast now gained a better and a happier life in the heavenly kingdom above, who art now enjoying an overflowing recompense for the labours thou didst endure on earth for the love of thy most beloved Spouse Jesus Christ, and for the charity thou didst ever show to thy neighbour: remember us who are miserable here below, and are still tossed on the waves of this world; pray for the holy Church, for thy sacred order; aid and favour thy devout and most loving servants, and gain for us by thy merits the grace of reaching the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

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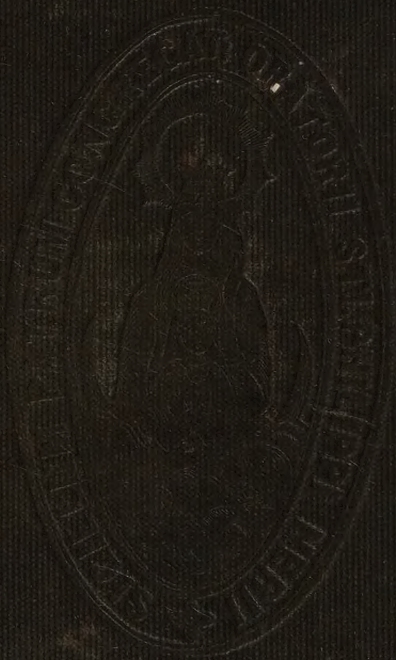
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